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SERMONS

ON

VARIOUS SUBJECTS.

BY A. FULLER.

EDINBURGH:

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THE Volume was begun several years ago, and printed as far as page 168; but, owing to an unforeseen occurrence, its progress in the press was impeded; nor has the Author been able to resume it till within the last few months.

Kettering, Feb. 22, 1814.

10167

The following *Errata* require the indulgence of the reader; who will perceive that they pertain to that part of the volume which was not printed under the Author's inspection.—Several errors not affecting the meaning are unnoticed.

Page 108, line 4 from bot. } *for* obtained, *read* have obtained.
—— 109, — 2, }
—— 109, — 18, *for* murderers, *read* murders.
—— 131, — 9 from bottom, *for* cometh, *read* cometh down.
—— 147, — 2 from bottom, *for* think, *read* thought
—— 152, — 4 from bottom, *for* rest, *read* less.
—— 155, — 8 from bottom, *for* wholly, *read* not wholly.
—— 156, — 7 from bottom, *for* replies, *read* implies.
—— 158, — 11 from bottom, *for* by the term, *read* suggested by the terms.
—— 165, — 11, *for* has, *read* as.
—— 168, — 4 from bottom, *for* believe, *read* believes.

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SOLITARY REFLEXION; OR THE SINNER DIRECTED TO LOOK INTO HIMSELF FOR CONVICTION.

SERMON I.

[Delivered on a Lord's-day evening, in a country village.]

PSALM iv. 4.

Commune with your own heart upon your bed, and be still.

YOU are assembled together, my dear hearers, that you may learn something concerning your everlasting welfare. I am glad to meet you; and shall be happy to communicate any thing that I understand on this important subject. I pray God to bless it for your good! You have heard many sermons preached, and yet perhaps have been but little profited; and you may hear many more to as little purpose. Religion consists not merely in hearing sermons, nor in going away and talking how you like or dislike the preacher. Religion is not found among noise, and clamour, and dispute. It does

not consist in either applauding or censuring men. If ever you hear to any purpose, it will make you forget the preacher, and think only of yourselves. You will be like a smitten deer, which, unable to keep pace with the herd, retires to the thicket, and bleeds alone. This is the effect that I long to see produced in you. It is for the purpose of impressing this upon your minds that I have read the above passage, and wish to discourse to you upon it. In doing this, all I shall attempt, will be to *explain* and *enforce* the admonition. Let us attempt

I. To explain the meaning of it.—The persons admonished in this psalm were men who set themselves against David, and persecuted him without a cause; accusing him perhaps to king Saul: and what greatly aggravates their guilt, they are said to have *turned his glory into shame;* that is, they reproached him on account of his religion, which was his highest honour. There are such scoffers in the world now: and as these wicked men opposed David, so they oppose our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of David according to the flesh. And by how much Christ is superior to David, by so much greater is the wickedness of those who mock at his gospel and people, than the other. They were many of them men of property:—*their corn and their wine* it

seems *increased;* and it is likely some of them were people in high life, who had access even to the king. But all this would not screen them from the displeasure of God. Even kings and judges themselves must submit to the SON, or perish from the way.*

And if riches will not profit in the day of wrath, neither will poverty. It is true, the scriptures wear a favourable aspect towards the poor. Jesus preached the gospel to them; and God is often represented as threatening and punishing those that oppress them: but if a man be wicked as well as poor, as it is well known great numbers are, his poverty will excite no pity; he must bear his iniquity.

Presumptuous and thoughtless sinners are admonished to *stand in awe, and sin not, to commune with their own hearts upon their bed, and be still.* Bold as any of you may be in sin, there is one above you that will call you to an account: pause therefore, and think what you are about. To commune with our hearts, means much the same as to ponder the matter over with ourselves. It is said of the adulteress, that *lest thou shouldst ponder the path of life, her ways are moveable, that thou canst not know*

* Psalm ii. 10—12.

*them.** She leads on her thoughtless admirers from one degree of sin to another, in quick succession; just as a person who should wish to lose you in a wood, and there murder you, would lead you on under some fair pretence, from path to path, through one winding direction after another, never suffering you to stand still and pause, lest you should turn back and effect your escape. Thus it is with sinners: they are hurried on by delusion from sin to sin, from company to company, and from one course of evil to another, while the enemy of their souls is doing every thing in his power to secure his dominion over them.

That which the adulteress most dreaded, was *thought*, close and serious thought: and this is it which the enemy of your souls most dreads. It is by pondering the path of life, if at all, that you must escape the snare. If sinners are saved, it is *from their sins.*† Their souls must be converted to the love of Christ; and the ordinary way that God takes to convert them, is by convincing them of sin, which is never effected but by their being brought to close and serious thought. It was by *thinking of his ways*, that David *turned his feet to God's testimonies.*‡

* Prov. v. 6. † Matt. i. 21. ‡ Psalm cxix. 59.

The *place* and *time* particularly recommended for this exercise, is *upon your bed* at night. If there be any time more favourable to reflection than others, it must be that in which you are free from all intruding company, and interruptions from without. Then, when you have retired from the world, and the world from you; when the hurry of business is withdrawn; when the tumult of the soul subsides, and is succeeded by a solemn stillness; when the darkness which surrounds you prevents the interference of sensible objects, and invites the mental eye to look inward: then commune with thine own heart; take a reckoning with thy soul; inquire what course thou art in, and whither it will lead thee!

It might be well to examine the actions of thy life: but as the *heart* is the spring-head of action, the state of thy heart must be the chief object of thy inquiry. As to actions, they are neither good nor evil, but as they are the expressions of the heart. Were you to kill a fellow-creature, you know there would be no evil in it, provided it was by mere accident, and not from any malicious design, nor criminal passion, nor careless neglect: and if you did ever so much good to your neighbour, yet if it were by accident, and not from design, there would be no goodness in it. It is the disposition of

our hearts that denominates our character in the sight of God. In all your communings, therefore, commune with your *hearts.*

You will say, perhaps, I find great difficulty in collecting my thoughts, and fixing them upon those things that are of the greatest importance. When I would think, I scarcely know what to think about. Well, give me leave then to suggest a few plain questions, which I would earnestly recommend to you to put home to your own soul.

First, DOES MY HEART CHUSE, AND FOLLOW AFTER THOSE THINGS WHICH MY CONSCIENCE TELLS ME ARE RIGHT? I can assure you many do not. Their consciences tell them that they ought to fear God, to keep holy the sabbath day, to read and hear the word of God, and to perform various other duties: but their hearts are at variance with all these things. Their consciences tell them that they ought not to swear, lie, steal, get intoxicated, cheat their creditors, and ruin their families: but their hearts nevertheless are set upon these, and many other such wicked courses, and they will pursue them at all events. Is this the case with any of you? It is a miserable life to have the heart and conscience at variance. You are sensible it is so;

and therefore, if any of you are of this description, you labour, I dare say, to lull conscience asleep, that you may enjoy the desires of your heart without interruption from its remonstrances. But this is a desperate way of going on. Conscience will not always sleep; and when it does awake, which perhaps may be upon a death-bed, its voice will be more terrible than thunder, and its accusations more painful than the sting of a scorpion. Did you never see a wicked man upon a dying bed? Perhaps not: possibly you can not bear such sights, and therefore shun them. There are persons however who have; and, witnessing his agony, have longed to alleviate it. The guilt, the fear, and the horror, which have appeared in his eyes, the bitter regret that has preyed upon his dying heart, and the forebodings of everlasting misery that seemed to have seized his soul, have wrung their hearts with anguish: but all they could do was to drop an unavailing tear. Given up to the hardness of his heart, even the doctrine of salvation by the blood of the Lamb has had no effect upon him, and he has died in all the misery of despair. Oh that this may not be your end! Yet if such be your life, and you persist in it, there is no reason to expect but that it will.

But it is possible you may not sustain this character. Your heart and conscience may not

be at such variance as to give you any considerable pain. If so, let me recommend a second question—Is MY CONSCIENCE INSTRUCTED AND FORMED BY THE WORD OF GOD? Though you may be certain that you are in a wrong course if you live in the violation of conscience; yet you cannot always conclude that you are in a right one when you do not violate it, because conscience itself may err. Saul was conscientious in persecuting the followers of Christ; yet he was one of *the chief of sinners* for so doing.* You may ask, what can a man do but follow that which he thinks to be right? True; but it becomes him to compare his thoughts with the word of God: for we are easily persuaded to think favourably of that conduct which suits our inclinations; and where this is the case, the error of the conscience, instead of excusing the evil conduct, becomes itself an evil.

The consciences of many people tell them, that if they take care of their families, pay every man his due, and attend public worship once or twice a week, this is all that can reasonably be expected at their hands. And I have heard this scripture passage brought in proof of it: *What doth the Lord thy God require of thee, but to do judgment, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with*

* Acts xxvi. 9. 1 Tim. i. 15. 1 Cor. xv. 9.

this satisfy you? Would you not disdain to accept of her services, unless you could have her heart with them? You must know that this is the truth. Out of thine own mouth therefore will the Lord judge thee.

Again: If you are told of God's awful threatenings against sin, your spirit rises against him, and you are ready to accuse him of cruelty: but ask your own heart, if you would spare one that had treated you as you have treated him? If you had begotten a son, and with all the tenderness of a father, nursed him, fed him, clothed him, and instructed him; and if when he arrived at years of maturity, instead of behaving towards you with filial obedience and gratitude, he should prove undutiful, malignant, false, and do all he could to ruin you and your family, would you not give him up to his evil courses, and let him take the consequences of his behaviour? Or should you from paternal pity, be disposed to pass over his transgressions; and should a common friend, with your approbation, intercede on his behalf, intreating him to beg your pardon, assuring him of your readiness to forgive the past; if, in addition to his former crimes, he continued to despise the overtures of mercy; what would you do with him? Or should he, when overwhelmed with troubles of

his own procuring, affect to be sorry for what he had done, and write to you in the strain of humble confession, praying you to deliver him this once, and vowing how different his conduct should be towards you in future; if, as soon as his troubles had subsided, he were to return again to his former courses; what would you do with him? Alas, all this, and a thousand times more, hast thou done against the best of Fathers, the God in whose hands thy breath is, and whose are all thy ways! *Yet you say, the way of the Lord is not equal: but now, saith the Lord, Is not my way equal; and are not your ways unequal?* *

Thirdly: One reason of your *knowing so little of your heart-sins* is, your communing so little with your hearts. You go on in a hurry of business, and the state and temper of your heart is overlooked; and being naturally disposed to flatter yourself, you imagine it to be much better than it is. You may be governed by the love of this world, yea, and be very covetous; so much so, that all who know you may percieve it; and yet you do not perceive it yourself, but are ready to be offended with any person who tells you of it. You think yourself as good as your neighbours, and flatter yourself that your

* Ezek. xviii. 25.

sin is not so very great. 'It is true, (say you) I have my failings, as all men have, but thank God I never was guilty of such things as many are.' So said the pharisee in the parable, *God I thank thee that I am not like other men:* and so said the wicked priests in the days of Malachi, *What have we done* so MUCH *against thee?* Oh my hearers, commune with your hearts, and you will find them to be very different from your present thoughts of them.

There is one thing in particular, which perhaps never struck your attention, your *total want of love to God.* This is the sin of your nature, and the fruitful parent of all other sins. God requires the whole heart, as indeed he justly may; for he is worthy of it: but you have no heart to give him. It is preoccupied, and that with such things as are contrary to God. All your actual sins are but little, compared with this. They have been committed only at different times; but this is a tide deep and large, that flows without cessation or interruption. Those are the fruits; but this is the poisonous root from which they spring. If you loved God, you could not love the world and the things of the world as you do. You could not blaspheme his name, neglect his worship, or trample on his laws, and all with unconcern.

Neither could you feel towards your neighbour as you do in many instances. All bitterness, and wrath, and malice, and evil speaking; all envy towards them that are above you, and pride, oppression, and unfeeling treatment, towards them that are beneath you; all arise from a want of the love of God: for he that loveth God, will love his brother also.

All unconverted sinners, I believe, retain a good opinion of their hearts, however they may differ in expressing it: and which is manifestly owing to their ignorance of its deceitfulness and desperate wickedness. Some make no secret of it. 'It is true, (say they) I now and then swear when in a passion, and get too much liquor once in a while; but I mean no evil; my heart is good.' Others, who have been brought up under evangelical preaching, are ashamed of this language, and would despise the ignorance of the person who should use it. They will not deny in words that their hearts are bad; howbeit they mean not so. By *heart* they understand, they know not what, something distinct from *intention, disposition,* or *desire.* Therefore they are sometimes heard to say, 'It is true, I am not converted; but I *desire* to be so. I cannot say, I love Christ; but I *wish* I did.' This is the same thing as saying, 'My heart is good. If I

be not a converted man, it is not my fault. I am willing at any time, if God would but convert me.' But all this is false and delusive. If you were willing to return to God by Jesus Christ, there is nothing in heaven or earth that stands in your way. The truth is, you love your sins too well to part with them for Christ or heaven; and have no desires after conversion *for its own sake*, but merely as a something, which at times you think you could submit to, rather than suffer eternal damnation. Whoever neglects to commune with his own heart, it is necessary for *you*, that you may know your true character; of which, with all your advantages, you are hitherto totally ignorant.

Even in the concerns of men with men, there is much blindness to their own motives, and deception in forming a judgment of their own conduct, which is owing to a want of looking into themselves. A thousand things are defended by persons in company, which, were they to retire alone, and commune with their own hearts, they would be obliged to condemn. In how many instances have contentions been kept up, and half a neighbourhood either brought in as witnesses, or in some way implicated in the contest, which might all have been decided in a quarter of an hour, if the party had only re-

tired alone and asked himself this question—Have I done to my neighbour what I should have wished him in like circumstances to have done to me?

Fourthly: There are things on account of which you may *value yourselves*, and of which you may *make a righteousness*, that if you were to retire alone, would be found of a very opposite nature. It is possible you may have been in the habit of reading a chapter in the bible once a week, or oftener, in your family; of frequenting public worship; of giving away something to people who are poorer than yourself; and of shunning public houses, and riotous assemblies. It is possible, likewise, that you may consider this as the way to heaven, and from hence lay your account with being happy in the world to come. But if you look into your heart, you may find that the motives which have influenced you have been such, that God can never approve of them; and if so, instead of justifying, they will serve only to condemn you. If you have read the scriptures or gone to worship, merely from custom, and not from any love you had to these things; if you have relieved the poor out of pride, rather than pure compassion; and if that which has preserved you from the grossest vices, has been rather a regard to your

interest, health, or character, than any concern for the honour of God; can such things be acceptable in his sight?

But if your motives were ever so pure, and your good deeds ever so many; yet having broken the holy, just, and good law of God, you cannot be justified by any thing which you can do. If you commune with your heart to any good purpose, you will never think of being saved by the works of your own hands; but feel the necessity of a Saviour, and of a great One. The doctrine of salvation by the death of Jesus will be glad tidings to your soul. Finally, you will, as you are exhorted in the verse following the text, *offer the sacrifices of righteousness, and put your trust in the Lord.* In other words, with a broken and a contrite spirit, you will approach the God against whom you have sinned; mourn over your unprovoked offences as one mourneth for an only son; and be in bitterness as one that is in bitterness for his first-born: and this without thinking of either your prayers or tears as being any thing, or of any account; but placing all your hope and help in him, who, *when we were without strength, in due time died for the ungodly.* To him be glory for ever! Amen.

SERMON II.

PSALM xiii. 2.

How long shall I take counsel in my soul, having sorrow in my heart daily.

WE have in a former discourse, considered the importance of looking into our own hearts, but that counsel is not applicable in all cases. There is such a thing as to pore on our guilt and wretchedness to the overlooking of our highest mercies. Though it be proper to know our own hearts for the purpose of conviction; yet if we expect consolation from this quarter, we shall find ourselves sadly disappointed.

Such appears to have been the case of David for a time. He seems to have been in great distress, and, as is common in such cases, his

*thy God?** But to say nothing of *the love of mercy* towards our fellow creatures; *to walk humbly with God* is a very different thing from the above exercises. When I hear such things as these represented as the exercise of a good conscience towards God, it reminds me of the language of certain unprincipled females, who talk of "using a conscience" toward their husbands, when, as they themselves would almost acknowledge, *their hearts are not with them.*

A man's conscience may be easy, and he may persuade himself that he is in the way to life, while in fact he is as far from it as the old pharisees, against whom the heaviest woes of damnation were denounced. The case of such people seems to be worse, on some accounts, than the openly profane: these, acting in opposition to their own consciences as well as to God, a faithful warning sometimes takes hold of their fears; but those, deluded by vain hope, consider all such warnings as inapplicable to them. Both are steering the same course; but the one is impeded by wind and tide, while the other is aided by the current of a perverted conscience. Do not forget to enquire, Is my conscience instructed and formed by the word of God? Perhaps you have not been in the habit of reading

* Micah vi. 8.

that sacred book; or of having it read to you. The neglect of it may occasion your eternal overthrow.

But let me recommend a third question—HAVE ANY, OR ALL MY PURSUITS, WHETHER AFTER NATURAL OR SINFUL ENJOYMENTS, EVER YET AFFORDED ME SATISFACTION? The answer to this question is of importance; because if they never have, there is no reason to conclude they ever will: and if so, what have you been after all this time? You have spent thirty, forty, fifty, or more years in the world, and by a thousand different methods, have been seeking satisfaction; yet you have not found it. You thought when you was young, to have found it in forbidden pleasures, and perhaps you gave a loose to appetite and desire; but you was disappointed. Guilt, infamy, and misery, were the fruits of those excesses. Your own heart will tell you this if you ask it. Since that time, having felt the effects of your former folly, it may be you have turned your attention to other things; you have settled; and now your object has been to raise yourself in the world. Saving money has seemed the one thing needful to render you happy. Perhaps you have saved a little of this article; and are you happy? Ask your own heart, and it will tell you. No,

you want to save *a little more.* Poor man, you are unhappy; and unhappy in this course you will be. Can you tell the reason? You have been trying to satisfy yourself with *that which is not bread.* Do you not know, that God hath created you with desires that it is not in the power of the whole creation to satisfy? Alexander and Cesar, those mighty monarchs, who each in his day conquered the world, were as far off from happiness as you are. The one is said to have wept because there was not another world to conquer; and the other to have exclaimed, when in the full possession of empire, "Is this all?"

If you inquire, wherefore hath God planted desires in your natures that it is not in the power of creation to satisfy. I answer, that you might be led to seek satisfaction where it is to be found. There is much meaning, and merciful meaning too, in those divine expostulations:— *Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy and eat; yea come, buy wine and milk without money, and without price. Wherefore do you spend money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which satisfieth not? Hearken diligently unto* ME, *and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness. Incline your ear, and*

come unto ME *: hear, and your soul shall live; dna I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David.** Again: *In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto* ME *and drink!* † And again: *Thou sayest I am rich, and increased in goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked. I counsel thee to buy of* ME *gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eye-salve that thou mayest see.* ‡

A fourth question I would recommend is this—WILL THE COURSE I AM IN DO TO DIE WITH? If it will, pursue it with all thy might: but first be well satisfied that it will. There is no way of answering this question, but by comparing your character with the word of God. There you find our Lord declaring to his disciples: *Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.* — *Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of God.*—And again: *Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of heaven.* Do you understand these things by experience? Did

* Isai. lv. 1, 2, 3. † John vii. 37. ‡ Rev. iii. 17, 18.

you ever seriously think about them? They are subjects of no little importance. Some men, and even some preachers, may tell you that all this signifies nothing more than your being baptised, or at most living a sober regular life; but it is at your peril to believe them against the solemn declarations of Christ. Nicodemus, a master in Israel, was ignorant of these things. Other teachers now may be the same; and if blind themselves, no wonder that they lead others equally blind, till both fall into the ditch. But as ye value your souls, remember who it is that hath said, *Ye must be born again.*

If you have never experienced this change, you are at present strangers to yourselves, to God, to Christ, and to the way of life; exposed to the curse of almighty God; and, dying in your present state, must perish for ever.

One question more let me recommend, and I will conclude this part of the subject—IF I SHOULD DIE IN AN UNCONVERTED STATE, AND PERISH FOR EVER, CAN I ENDURE THE WRATH OF AN OFFENDED GOD? If you can; why, then, let every man help his neighbour, and every one say to his brother, be of good courage; laugh at death; set judgment at defiance; and make a jest of an hereafter . . . . but if not, pause and think . . . .

Who can forbear remarking the cowardice of wicked men; how even in this world these bold spirits are cut down with a little affliction. Those who trifle most with hell, and whose lips are so full of damnation that it becomes in their mouths a mere matter of bravado, how do they sink under the first touch of God's indignation. Gaal and his company could eat, and drink, and curse Abimelech at a distance; but when Abimelech drew near, lo! they are covered with dismay.

Oh profane character! Can thine hands be strong, and thine heart endure, in the day that he shall deal with thee? If you cannot tell how to endure the sufferings of life, what will you do in the hour of death; how especially will you grapple with the bitter pains of eternal death? *If ye have run with the footmen, and they have wearied you, how will you contend with horses; and if in the land of peace, wherein ye trusted, they wearied you, how will ye do in the swellings of Jordan?* Such, or nearly such, my hearers, will be your own reflexions, if, upon your bed, you commune with your own hearts to any good purpose. But I proceed

II. To enforce the subject, by considering the great importance of a serious compliance with it.—There is nothing more dreaded by un-

converted sinners than solitary reflexion, and therefore nothing more necessary. They are like a person whose affairs are going to ruin, and who feels a strong reluctance to enter into a thorough examination of his accounts. And wherefore? Because such an examination would destroy his present peace, and he would be under the necessity of making a full stop. To avoid this, he puts far from him the evil day; and cherishes a vain hope that things are not so bad as they appear. But, as in this case, the longer the business of a thorough examination is deferred, the deeper he sinks; so it is in the other. Let me request your attention to a few observations on this part of the subject.

First: There are things that you have *doubted*, or acted as if you doubted, which, if you would but retire, and converse with your own heart, you would find to be true. You have acted but in too many instances as though you doubted whether you were accountable and immortal creatures; and as though an agreeable subsistence in the present world were the only thing that should concern you. But if you be not accountable to him that made you, how is it that sin, which is unknown to every creature but yourself, should nevertheless be accompanied with remorse? Is there not a tribunal erected within

your own bosom that forebodes a judgment to come? If there were no hereafter, why that dread of death, and that fearful looking-for of judgment in the hour of threatening affliction? Oh sinner, thou shalt not be able to plead ignorance at the bar of heaven: thine own heart, depraved as it is, will bear witness against thee.

Secondly: There are things you are apt to *object* to in God's dealings with you, which, were you to commune with your own hearts, would be found to be unobjectionable. If you are told of the strictness of God's holy law, and that nothing short of *truth in the inward parts* can answer to its requirements, you think it hard, and feel disposed to complain of the grievousness of his yoke: but ask your own hearts, Would *you* be contented with any thing less from a fellow-creature?

Perhaps you are a parent, or a master; and what if your children or servants were through fear ever so assiduous, if you knew they had no love for you, would you be satisfied? Or perhaps you are a husband. If the partner of your life were alienated from you, and attached to another man, though, through fear of your displeasure, she were studious to the utmost to oblige you in her outward deportment, would

thoughts turned inward, casting in his mind what he should do, and what would be the end of things. While thus exercised, he had *sorrow in his heart daily:* but betaking himself to God for relief, he succeeded; *trusting in his mercy, his heart rejoiced in his salvation.*

There are many persons, who, when in trouble, imitate David in the former part of this experience: I wish we may imitate him in the latter. In discoursing on the subject, I shall first notice the disconsolate situation of the psalmist, with the remedy to which he repaired under it; and then inquire to what cases it is applicable amongst us, and whether the same remedy be not equally adapted to our relief as to his.

I. LET US NOTICE THE DISCONSOLATE SITUATION OF THE PSALMIST, WITH THE REMEDY TO WHICH HE REPAIRED UNDER IT.—The psalm is probably one of those mournful songs which he composed during his persecution by Saul: but, like most others, though it begins in complaint, it ends in triumph. We may be certain he was pressed with great *difficulties:* for we do not take counsel with ourselves or others, but in such cases. The particulars of his situation may be collected from the different parts of the psalm.

First: *He was sorely persecuted.* This was a mysterious providence. God had anointed him to the throne, and brought him into public life; it might have been expected therefore, that he would have made his way plain before him: yet, in following what must manifestly appear to him the leadings of his divine guide, he brings upon himself a flood of evils. Though nothing was further from his intention than using any means to dethrone his sovereign; yet he is jealous, and his dependants are stirred up by envy and malice to compass the ruin of the innocent. Let not those who are candidates for an immortal crown be surprised if their path to glory be covered with snares and pits: it is through much tribulation we must enter the kingdom.

Secondly: *The Lord seemed to prosper his persecutors, and not him:* his enemy was *exalted over him.* This seems more mysterious still. Is the God of Israel then a man that he should lie, or the son of man that he should repent? Does he use lightness? Or the things which he purposes, does he purpose according to the flesh; that with him there should be yea, yea, and nay, nay? Far be it from him. Yet if we were to judge by appearances, we might at times be tempted to draw such conclusions.

Thirdly: *His most intimate acquaintance seem to have forsaken him.* In cases of difficulty we usually advise with our friends, if we have any. If we are driven *to take counsel with ourselves* therefore, it may be presumed that we are bereft of that consolation. A sympathising, wise, and faithful friend, in a time of difficulty, is a great blessing. In times of prosperity many will profess a regard to us; but if persecution for Christ's sake should overtake us, we may expect some to stand aloof who now court our acquaintance. This has been the lot of men of whom the world was not worthy; and it was no small part of their affliction, that they had to suffer by themselves. Let us not complain of such things, however. Our Lord himself was forsaken by friend and lover. He took three of his most beloved disciples to accompany him in the hour of his sufferings, but they fell asleep, and left him to agonize alone.

Fourthly: *To these temporal distresses were added others of a spiritual nature:* the Lord *hid his face from him,* and to him it appeared, as though he had *forgotten him.* If, under his outward troubles he could have enjoyed inward peace; if he could have poured out his heart with freedom in secret; if, though banished from the sanctuary, yet, looking towards that

house, and calling upon the Lord, he had heard him from heaven his dwelling-place, his load had been supportable: but to have to say with Job, *Behold I go forward, but he is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive him; on the left hand where he doth work, but I cannot behold him: he hideth himself on the right hand, that I cannot see him!* This gives a double weight to the affliction. But here also we have no reason to complain. David has been before us; and what is more, David's Lord. Jesus was persecuted; his enemies were exalted over him; his friends were scattered from him; and, to fill up the bitter cup, his God forsook him. This was the sorrow of sorrows. He speaks as one that could have borne any thing else. *My God, my God . . . why hast* THOU *forsaken me!*

Finally: *All this was not for a few days only; but for a long time.* How LONG *wilt thou forget me?* How LONG *wilt thou hide thy face from me?* How LONG *shall I take counsel in my soul?* The intenseness of the affliction renders it trying to our fortitude; but it is by the continuance of it that patience is put to the test. It is not under the sharpest, but the longest trials, that we are most in danger of fainting. In the first case, the soul collects all its strength, and feels in earnest to call in help from above; but in the last,

the mind relaxes, and sinks into despondency. When Job was accosted with evil tidings in quick succession, he bore it with becoming fortitude: but when he could see no end to his troubles, he sunk under them.

These were some of the particulars which made up the load of David; and under which he is said to have *taken counsel in his soul.* The phrase seems to be expressive of great restlessness of spirit, a poring over his misery, a casting in his mind what he should do, and what would be the end of these things. Perhaps if we had been secreted near him, we should have seen him walking by himself, now looking upwards, then downwards, weeping as he went, or sighing under a load that would not suffer him to weep; sometimes sinking into torpid silence, and sometimes interrogating himself on his future conduct. 'What shall I do? Which way shall I take? Shall I go backward, or forward; or shall I stand still? Shall I try any other means; or shall I despair?'

From this tumult of the mind we are certain he obtained relief; for towards the close of the psalm he deals in the language of triumph—*I will sing unto the Lord because he hath dealt bountifully with me.* Nor are we left to guess

in what manner his soul was delivered from this state of dejection. *I have trusted,* says he, *in thy mercy: my heart shall rejoice in thy salvation.* From hence we may gather, that the way in which he obtained relief, was by CEASING TO TAKE COUNSEL IN HIS SOUL, AND BY LOOKING OUT OF HIMSELF, AND TRUSTING IN THE MERCY OF GOD.

This remedy was competent to the removal of all his complaints. What is it that mercy, divine mercy, mercy through a Mediator, mercy connected with omnipotence and veracity, can not effect? Was he persecuted? By trusting in this he would cease to fear what man could do unto him. Was the hand of providence apparently against him? That might be, and yet all in the end work together for good. Did his friends forsake him? The compassion of his best friend would more than make up this loss. But did he also hide his face from him? Still he could do no better than apply to the mercy-seat, and supplicate his return. Finally, Was all this complicated load of trials of *long continuance?* After waiting patiently for the Lord, he would hear him, would bring him out of the horrible pit, set his feet upon a rock, establish his goings, and put a new song into his mouth. Such indeed was the issue of his pre-

sent trials, which is recorded for the encouragement of others who shall be in like circumstances.

II. LET US INQUIRE TO WHAT CASES THE SUBJECT IS APPLICABLE AMONGST US; AND WHETHER THE SAME REMEDY BE NOT EQUALLY ADAPTED TO OUR RELIEF AS TO THAT OF DAVID. The holy Spirit has drawn the likeness of man in all situations, that we might find our case, and learn instruction. If we barely read them as a description of the concerns of persons who lived a long time ago, and make no application of it to ourselves, we shall miss the great end for which the scriptures were given us. The case of the psalmist appears to me to be applicable to three descriptions of people.

First: *To persons who sink into despondency under the adverse providences of God.*—God hath poured a portion of sorrow into the cup of human life. Property, connexions, friends, children, and every other avenue of natural enjoyment becomes at one time or other an inlet to grief: and if in these seasons of adversity the attention be turned inward rather than directed to the Father of mercies, we shall be in danger of sinking under them.

We have seen men who, under the smiles of providence have been cheerful and amiable, when disappointments and losses have overtaken them, sink into sullen dejection, and never more lift up their head. In some instances it has issued in suicide. It is a dangerous thing to take counsel in our souls to the neglect of the counsel of God.

We have seen others, wretched beyond expression, owing to unhappy connexions. In the formation of them, religion has been overlooked, and even genuine affection, for the sake of advantages of a worldly nature. The consequence has been, on the one side neglect, dislike, strife, cruelty, and infidelity; on the other disappointment, jealousy, unavailing reflexion, a broken spirit, a fixed melancholy, and every thing but absolute despair. Oh, with what desire could I draw off the attention of such broken hearts from things below to things above; from taking counsel in their souls to trusting in the mercy of God in Christ Jesus! Many a wounded spirit has by this means been healed, and rendered happy for life; besides being prevented from plunging, in the agony of desperation, into the gulph of eternal ruin.

We have seen even religious characters inordinately depressed with troubles. The loss of some

darling object, the confounding of some favourite scheme, or the rising of some apparently insurmountable difficulty, has overwhelmed the heart. In such circumstances, the mind is apt to nurse its melancholy, trying to live as it were on dying elements: but it is not thus that we shall either glorify God, or gain relief. Jesus hath said, *Let not your hearts be troubled; ye believe in God, believe also in me.* From troubles of some kind there is no exemption in the present state: but it does not become the followers of Christ to indulge in *heart* troubles for little things; and such are all our worldly sorrows; *light* afflictions which are but for a moment. The true christian life is to be inordinately *careful for nothing; but in every thing, by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let our requests be made known unto God.* It is thus that *the peace of God which passeth all understanding, shall keep our hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.** It is by ceasing to take counsel in our souls, and trusting in God's mercy, that our sorrow, like that of David, will be turned into joy and triumph. Our way may be covered with darkness, so much that we cannot see where the next step will place us: but we have a leader who sees through all, and who has promised to *guide us with his eye.* Things may so work as to confound our calcu-

* Phil. iv. 6, 7.

lations: but if all work together for good, this is sufficient. What are our afflictions too, in comparison of the glory that awaits us? Paul had his afflictions as well as we, far greater indeed than ours have been; and he also *took counsel* under them; but not *with himself:* he took into his account the hope that was set before him. *I reckon*, saith he, *that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us.* It is while we thus look *not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen, that our afflictions* appear *light* and *momentary*, and *work for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.*

Secondly: The case of the psalmist is applicable to *persons who, at the outset of their religious concern, are encompassed with darkness and long continued dejection.*—There are some who are no sooner brought to entertain a just sense of the nature and demerits of sin, than they are led to embrace the gospel way of salvation, and find rest to their souls: but it is not so with all. Some are known to continue for a long time in a state of dark suspense. They have too deep a sense of sin to be able to enjoy the pleasures of this world; and are too much in the dark concerning its forgiveness to be able to imbibe

the joys of another. Hence their days are spent in solitude and dejection: they search for peace, but it is far from them: they *take counsel in their soul, and have sorrow in their heart daily.*

Various things contribute to promote this state of mind. In some it may be owing to circumstances *without* them. It may be, like David, they have no friend to whom they can open their minds; or if they have, it may have been to persons who were either total strangers to these things, or who were unskilful in the word of righteousness. Such also may have been the kind of preaching they have sat under, that nothing suitable to their case has been ordinarily, if ever delivered. If the preacher be of such a description as to content himself with moral harangues; if, instead of exhibiting the Saviour of sinners, he have nothing to say to a wounded spirit, unless it be to advise him to forsake his vices and be better; or if his object be rather to improve the manners of men, and render them decent members of society, than to renew their hearts; the tendency of his preaching will be, either to establish the hearer in pharisaical presumption, or sink him into despondency.

Or should the preacher be of another description; should he hold forth a kind of Mahomedan

predestination; be averse to the free invitations of the gospel to sinners as sinners, and employ himself in persuading his hearers that no one has any warrant to come to Jesus for eternal life but the regenerate, the effects will be much the same. The awakened sinner will either take up with some enthusiastic impression, imagine himself a favourite of heaven, *trusting that he is righteous and despising others;* or, having no consciousness that he is regenerate, be deterred from approaching the Saviour, and so sink into despondency.

Could I gain access to such a character, I would proclaim in his ear, the MERCY *of God to sinners;* the all-sufficiency and willingness of Jesus to save all that are willing to be saved by him; and the free invitations of the gospel as a sufficient warrant for him or any other sinner to trust his immortal interests in his hands. O ye that labour and are heavy laden, *come to Jesus, and ye shall find rest unto your souls!* Do not dream of first ascertaining your election, or regeneration, and of approaching the Saviour as a favourite of heaven: it is only by believing in him as a perishing sinner, that thou canst obtain satisfaction of these things. It is by the gospel coming to us not in word only, but in power, that our election of God is known, and our regeneration ascertained.

In others, such dejection may be owing to something *within* them. It may arise from a kind of propensity to think on things which are against them, rather than those which make in their favour; viewing only the dark side of the cloud; dwelling on the magnitude of their guilt, their unworthiness of mercy, and the little success they have had in praying and striving to enter in. This propensity is often fed by an idea that it would be presumption in such sinners as they are to admit the consolation of the gospel; and that it is abundantly more becoming them to stand aloof in darkness and misery. But this is not christian humility. It is a spurious kind of modesty, the principle of which is nearly akin to that voluntary humility and self-denial, that induces men to abstain from that which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving. Notwithstanding the modest and humble appearance which these objections assume, they will be found to be no better than a *species of self-righteous pride*, opposed to the humiliating gospel of Christ. When you object, for instance, that you are *unworthy* of such great and unspeakable blessings as the gospel reveals, and therefore that it would be presumption in you to accept of them, what is this but saying, that before you can have any warrant to receive these blessings, you must be *worthy* of them, at least

somewhat more so than you are at present; and probably you hope in time to become so. But this is the very essence of self-righteousness, and directly opposite to the gospel of Christ. Christ came into the world to seek and save them that are *lost*. He came into the world to save *sinners*, even the chief of sinners. He hath no mercy to bestow on sinners, but as undeserving. If any man think himself deserving of his grace, his answer is, *I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.* The very meaning of the word *grace*, of which the scriptures speak so largely, is FREE FAVOUR TO THE UNWORTHY: unworthiness, therefore, can be no ground of objection. If there be any bar in thy way, it is thy conceit of some kind of worthiness being necessary to recommend thee to the grace of the Saviour: and take heed lest thou perish under this delusion after the example of apostate Israel; who *followed after the law of righteousness, but never attained it: and wherefore? Because they sought it not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law: for they stumbled at that stumbling stone.*

If such should not be the end of things with thee, yet, to say the least, so long as this self-righteous spirit possesses thee, thou shalt be a miserable creature, and never be able to find rest

unto thy soul: and it certainly behoves thee to take heed lest this should not be the worst. The question is not whether the blessings of pardon, justification, and eternal life, be too great for our deserts: are they beyond our wants? Can we do with less? If they are not too great for our necessities, nor too great for the ever blessed God, through the mediation of his Son, to bestow, who are we that we should hesitate to accept of them? If he present to us the cup of salvation, shall we not drink it? True humility, instead of making objections, would answer, *Be it unto thy servant according to thy word.*

We are assured by him that cannot lie, that if we *inquire for the good old way*, the way in which all the faithful have gone from age to age, *and walk in it, we shall find rest unto our souls.** We know also who it was that applied the walking in this *good old way* to faith in his name, obedience to his authority, and conformity to his example: saying, *Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart, and you shall find rest unto your souls: for my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.*† From hence we may certainly conclude, that if we do not find rest unto our souls, it must

* Jer. vi. 16. † Matt. xi. 28, 29, 30.

be owing to our not coming to him as a Saviour, or not yielding to his authority as a king, or not learning to copy after his example: and if we comply not with the first, in vain do we flatter ourselves with conformity to the last. We shall never *work the works of God* till we *believe in him whom he hath sent.**

A willingness to be saved, and ruled, and modelled, according to the mind of Christ, is generally the last thing of which sinners are apt to suspect themselves. They think they are willing, and even desirous to be saved in his way, and to become his people; and that the only question is, whether Christ be willing to save them: whereas all such thoughts are founded in error. We are not straitened in him, but in our own bowels. If we can so believe in him as to relinquish every false system of religion, and every false ground of hope, falling into the arms of free *mercy* as the chief of sinners; and if we can so yield ourselves up to him as to be willing to have our ear bored, as it were, to the door-posts of his house, and to serve him for ever, there is no obstruction in heaven or in earth to our salvation.

Oh disconsolate and desponding sinner! Thou hast been reading, thinking, hearing, pray-

* John vi. 28, 29.

ing, striving, and yet thou art never the nearer: no peace, no rest to thy soul, nor ascendency over thy sins. Like the beast in the mire, all thy striving serves but to sink thee deeper. Let me ask thee a few questions: Understandest thou what thou readest? The disciples were as dark and as sorrowful as thou art till they *understood the scriptures.** Do thy thoughts accord with God's thoughts, as they are revealed in the scriptures? God's thoughts are as much above those of man, as the heavens are higher than the earth.† Let me intreat thee particularly to consider, whether thy prayers have been offered up *in the name of Jesus*, or with an eye to his mediation? Perhaps hitherto thou hast *asked nothing in his name. Ask and receive, that thy joy may be full.* Remember this too, it is he himself who invites thee to do so. *The captive exile hasteneth that he may be loosed, and that he should not die in the pit:* follow his example. Here, in the gospel of free grace, in exchange for thy horrible situation, is *rock* for thy feet, and a *new song* for thy mouth. It is vain for thee to think of overcoming thy sins, any more than of obtaining forgiveness in any other way. Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God? Cease then from taking counsel in thy soul, trust in

* Luke xxiv. 45, 52, 53. † Isai. lv. 8, 9.

the mercy of God through a mediator, and thy heart shall rejoice in his salvation.

Thirdly: The case of the psalmist is applicable *to persons who, during the greater part of their religious profession, live under habitual fear lest they should not at* last *prove real christians.*—This description of professing christians, of whom there is a considerable number amongst us, seems to have been scarcely known in the primitive ages. In those times they appear to have been generally conscious of being what they professed to be, believers in the Son of God; and knowing that such had the promise of eternal life, they did not ordinarily doubt upon the subject. It was possible, however, at that time as well as this, for the mind to be in doubt of its own sincerity. They had hypocrites and self-deceivers as well as we; hence, in describing the graces of the Spirit, the sacred writer speaks of *faith unfeigned,* and of *love without dissimulation.* And as the denouncing of a hypocrite amongst the apostles caused each one to enquire, *Lord, is it I?* so, doubtless, the most upright character would be subject to occasional fears, lest he should be found deceiving his own soul. This seems to be the kind of *fear* which the apostle describes as cast out by *perfect love:* and as the love of the primitive christians greatly

abounded, their fears and doubts with regard to their own sincerity were consequently but few.

One great cause, I apprehend, of the prevalence of such fears in sincere people of the present age, is the great degree in which the attention is turned inward, and the small degree in which it is directed to the things of God as revealed in the scriptures: or, to use the language of the text, *the taking counsel in their souls.*

I do not mean to discourage all remembrance of past experiences. The members of the church of Sardis are admonished to remember *how they had received and heard;* and David, under great dejection of mind, resolved to *remember the Lord from the land of Jordan, and of the Hermonites, and from the hill Mizar.* Much less do I mean to countenance the notions of such writers and preachers, who cry down all evidences of grace; all marks and signs of internal christianity taken from the work of sanctification in the soul. Far be this from me. I am persuaded, that for any man to reject evidences of personal religion drawn from this quarter, he must fall very little short of rejecting his bible.* But though sanctification be the evidence of an interest in spiritual blessings, yet it is not so much by re-

* See especially 1 John ii. 3, 5. iii. 14, 18—21, 24.

membering our past religious experience that we shall obtain satisfaction, as by renewed exercises of grace. The apostle in the forecited passages, when describing the means by which we are to come at the knowledge of our personal religion, makes no mention of things past, but of things present, of which the mind is supposed to be conscious at the time. *Hereby*, saith he, *we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments—Whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him —We know that we have passed from death unto life*, not because we HAVE LOVED, but *because we* LOVE *the brethren.* And if satisfaction be attainable only by the renewed exercises of grace, our object is to ascertain the method best adapted to promote such exercises, which I am persuaded will be found to be a looking out of ourselves to the truths and consolations revealed in the scriptures.

To attempt to ascertain the reality of our religion by a remembrance of past experiences of grace, is attempting what in most cases must needs be, to say the least, extremely difficult, and if accomplished would be of no use. The mind is not formed for such a remembrance of its own ideas and sensations as this would require. It is true, those impressions which are

singularly striking will often be remembered at a distant period; but not in that clear and lively manner in which they are felt at the time. It is only a *general* recollection of things that is ordinarily retained: to be employed therefore, in raking over our past feelings in order to find out whether we be real christians, is almost a hopeless undertaking. If it were otherwise, and we could clearly gain the object of our research, still it has no tendency to glorify God. The way to glorify him is to *bring forth much fruit;* and not merely to remember that we did bring forth fruit some twenty or thirty years ago. Those examples which the scriptures afford of persons looking back to past experiences, were not for the purpose of ascertaining their own sincerity, but for the regaining of those sensations which at former periods they had possessed. The reasons why the churches of Ephesus and Sardis were admonished to remember their first love, was that they might recover it: and the object of David in his recollection of past times, was not so much that he might determine what were the nature of his experiences at those times, as that he might regain his confidence in GOD. I will remember THEE, saith he, from the land of Jordan, and of the Hermonites, *and from the hill Mizar.* GOD was the object he sought, and the remembrance of what he had formerly

experienced of his goodness and faithfulness, was the MEANS he used to find him. Allowing, therefore, that the remembrance of past sensations may afford us satisfaction as to the reality of our personal religion, yet it is no otherwise than as *reviving* those sensations, by which they become renewed exercises of grace. If we can recollect those things which endeared the Lord Jesus Christ and his religion to us at a former period, and so recover our affection towards them, such a recollection will be profitable, and will serve to strengthen our evidences of interest in them. But if we think of gaining satisfaction on this subject by a mere remembrance of past affections without any consciousness of present ones, we shall be disappointed; or, which is worse, if we imagine that we have gained our object, it will prove in the end that a *deceived heart hath turned us aside.*

If we would wish to discover whether there were any particles of steel in a large quantity of rubbish, it would not be the wisest way to search for them, and especially in the dark, but to hold a large and efficacious magnet over them. And this is the way to discover true religion in our souls, if it be there. The truths and promises of God are that to a principle of religion in the mind which the magnet is to the steel:

if there be any in us, the proper exhibition of the gospel will ordinarily draw it forth.

If it be a matter of doubt with you whether you be truly converted, far be it from me to go about to persuade you that you are so. Your doubts may be well-founded for ought I can tell: and, supposing they should be so, the door of mercy is still open. If you have obtained mercy, the same way is open for your obtaining it again: and if not, there is no reason why you should not obtain it now. The consolations I have to recommend, are addressed to you not as converted, nor as unconverted; not as elect, nor as non-elect; but as *sinners:* and this character I suppose you have no doubt of sustaining. All the blessings of the gospel are freely presented for acceptance to sinners. Sinners, whatever their character has been, have a compleat warrant to receive them; yea, it is their duty to do so, and their great sin if they do not. Nothing but ignorance, unbelief, self-righteous pride, or some such evil state of mind, prevents it. The gospel supper is provided; all things are ready; and the king's servants are commissioned to persuade, and as it were compel them to come in. If you accept this invitation, all are yours. I ask not whether you be wil-

ling to be saved in God's way, in order to determine your right to accept; the message sent you in the gospel determines this: but in order to ascertain your interest in spiritual blessings. If you cordially believe the gospel, you have the promise of eternal life. If its blessings suit your desires, they are all your own. If, for example, it does not offend you, but accord with your very heart to sue for mercy as the chief of sinners; if you be willing to occupy that place which the gospel assigns you, which is *the dust;* and to ascribe to Jesus that which God has assigned to him, *Power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing;* if you can unreluctantly give up all claim to favour on the footing of your own worthiness, and desire nothing so much as to be found in Christ, not having your own righteousness; if the salvation you seek be a deliverance from the dominion of sin, as well as from its damning power: finally, if the heaven you desire be that which the scriptures reveal, a state of pure and holy enjoyment, there can be no just cause to doubt of your interest in these things. To imagine that you believe all that God has revealed concerning hi[illegible] and that *with all your heart, receiving the love of the truth that you may be saved;* and yet that

something else is wanting to denominate you believers, is to imagine that believing is not believing.

Read the holy scriptures; pray to the fountain of light for understanding; attend the preaching of the word; and all this not with the immediate view of determining what you are, but what Christ is: and if you find that in him in which your whole soul acquiesces, this without your searching after it, will determine the question as to your personal interest in him.

SERMON III.

MATT. XV. 21—28.

Then Jesus went thence, and departed into the coasts of Tyre and Sidon. And behold, a woman of Canaan came out of the same coasts, and cried unto him, saying, Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou Son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil. But he answered not a word. And his disciples came and besought him, saying, Send her away, for she crieth after us. But he answered and said, I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Then came she and worshipped him, saying, Lord, help me. But he answered and said, It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs. And she said, Truth, Lord; yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their master's table. Then Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman! great is thy faith; be it unto thee even as thou wilt: and her daughter was made whole from that very hour.

WHEN John sent a message to Jesus, saying, *Art thou he that should come, or look we for another?* Jesus gave an indirect answer, an

answer containing a reproof. Whether John himself, retaining, like the apostles, the notion of a temporal kingdom, and therefore expecting, on his being put in prison, that a great revolution would follow in favour of the Messiah, and hearing of nothing but companies of poor people repairing to him to be healed of their infirmities, began to hesitate whether he might not have been mistaken; or whether he only personated some of his disciples; somebody appears to have been stumbled at the simplicity of Christ's appearance. Hence the indirect answer of Jesus: *Go and shew John again those things which ye do hear and see: the blind receive their sight, and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached unto them—And blessed is he that shall not be offended in me.** To be encompassed by crowds of afflicted people, supplicating for mercy, and employed in relieving them, was sustaining a character, though far from what the world calls splendid, yet truly great, and worthy of the Messiah. The short account of this poor woman is more profitable to be read than a long and minute history of military exploits.

In endeavouring to improve this brief story, we will notice, Who the petitioner was, what

* Matt. xi. 4—6.

was her errand, and the repeated applications which were made, with the repeated repulses, but ultimate success, that she met with.

I. LET US OBSERVE WHO THE PETITIONER WAS. She is said to be *a woman of Canaan.* Mark says she was *a Greek*; but the term in this and some other connexions, seems to denote only that she was a gentile, and not that she came from the country called Greece; for in the same passage she is said to have been *a Syrophenician by nation.*

She was a gentile; one of the first fruits of that harvest of gentiles that was shortly to be gathered in. Our Lord, though he was sent as he said, *to the lost sheep of the house of Israel,* yet extended his mercy to individuals of other nations: and it is worthy of notice, that those few who were gathered at this early period, are highly commended for the eminence of their faith. Like the first fruits of the earth, they were the best. It might still be said, on a review of things amongst us, that such faith as that of the woman of Canaan and the Roman centurion is rarely to be found in Israel.

Farther: She was not only a gentile, but one of those gentiles who were under a *peculiar curse.*

She appears to have been one of the descendants of the ancient Canaanites, many of whom, when driven from their own country, settled on the coasts of Tyre and Sidon. We know the curse to which that people were devoted, even from the days of their ancestor Canaan, the son of Ham. We know also that Joshua was commanded not to spare them, and Israel forbidden to make leagues with them. This curse, however, came not upon them but for their being an exceedingly wicked people. The abominations of which they were guilty, and which were nursed by their idolatry as by a parent sin, are given as the reason why the land vomited out its inhabitants, and why Israel must form no alliances with them, lest they should learn their ways. There was no time in which the God of Israel refused even a Canaanite who repented and embraced his word. Of this, Rahab the harlot, Uriah the Hittite, Ornan the Jebusite, and others, were examples. The door of mercy has ever been open to faith: and though it seemed in this instance to be shut, it was only to prove the party, and to induce her to plead with greater importunity.

II. LET US NOTICE HER ERRAND. It was not her own case, but a case which she had made her own, that of her young daughter. She

pleaded it, however, as if it were her own—*Have mercy on* ME—*Lord help* ME! From this part of the subject we may learn,

First: *That in our approaches to Christ, it becomes us to go not for ourselves only, but for others around us, and to make their cases ours.* He to whom the application was made, could not but approve of this principle; for it was that on which he himself was acting at the time. He took the cause of perishing sinners, and made it his own. *He bore our griefs, and carried our sorrows.* A spirit of sympathy is the very spirit of Christ, which they that are joined to him must needs possess.

Secondly: *That it behoves us more especially to carry the cases of our children to the Lord, and to make them our own.* It may be they are too young to understand or feel their own malady, or to know where help is to be had; in this case, surely it is our proper business to personate them before the Lord: or it may be their minds are blinded, and their hearts hardened by the deceitfulness of sin, so as to have no desire to pray for themselves; and in this case we can do no less than carry their case to him who alone is able to help. What less, and in many cases, what more can an afflicted parent do

for an ungodly child? It is true, we have no ground to expect the salvation of our children while they continue hardened; but Jesus is exalted to *give repentance and the remission of sins*, and while we present our supplication in a way of submission to his will, he will not be offended with us. It was the practice of holy Job to offer sacrifices for his children; and it seems to be a part of God's plan in many instances to bless the children at the intercession of the parent; and thus to express his approbation of something which they have done for him. *The Lord give mercy to the house of Onisiphorus*, said Paul, *for he hath oft refreshed me, and was not ashamed of my chain.*

III. LET US REMARK THE REPEATED APPLICATIONS, THE REPEATED REPULSES, AND THE ULTIMATE SUCCESS WHICH CROWNED THE WHOLE. Here were no less than four applications; three of which were made by the woman herself, and one by the disciples on her behalf. Three out of the four failed; but the fourth succeeded. Let us examine them, and the success they met with distinctly.

The *first* was made by the woman, and is described as follows:—*She cried unto him, saying, Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou Son of*

David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil. We might remark the brevity, the fulness, and the earnestness of this petition; but there is one thing which our Lord himself afterwards noticed, and which therefore is particularly deserving of our attention: it *was the prayer of faith.* She *believed* and confessed him to be the Messiah. Her addressing him under the character of *Lord,* and as *the Son of David,* amounted to this. It was a principle universally acknowledged among the jews, that the Lord, or king Messiah, should be of the seed of David. To address him therefore under this character, was confessing him to be the Christ. This was the appellation under which he was more than once invoked by certain blind men; * and in every instance the same idea was meant to be conveyed. These poor people did not address our Saviour in a way of unmeaning complaisance: they understood that the Messiah, *the Son of David,* was to be distinguished by the exercise of *mercy:* hence they continually associated these ideas, HAVE MERCY on me, O Lord, thou SON OF DAVID—*Jesus, thou* SON OF DAVID, HAVE MERCY *on us!* And this is the very character given to the Messiah in the old testament, especially in the seventy-second psalm. *He shall deliver the needy when he crieth; the poor*

* Matt. ix. 27. xx. 30, 31.

also, and him that hath no helper. Thus they had heard, thus believed, and thus their faith wrought in a way of effectual prayer.

But whence had this woman, an alien from the commonwealth of Israel, a stranger to the covenants of promise, this wisdom? Providence had placed her on the borders of the holy land, and she appears to have profited by it. The true religion, contained in the oracles of God, had its influence not only on Israel, but on many individuals in the neighbouring nations. It was foretold, that they who dwelt *under his shadow* should return; and we see it accomplished. Probably this poor Canaanite had often gone into the jewish synagogue to hear the reading of the law and the prophets, and while many of those who read them gained only a superficial acquaintance with them, she understood them to purpose. One would almost think she must lately have heard the seventy-second psalm read at one of these assemblies, and have made up her petition out of the passage above cited. *He shall deliver the needy when he crieth; the poor also, and him that hath no helper;*—then why not me? I will go and turn this prophecy into a prayer; *Have mercy upon me, O Lord, thou Son of David.* It is good to have our residence near to the means of grace, and to have a heart to make

use of them. It is good to grow upon the banks of this river of the water of life. It is pleasant also to think of the good effects of the true religion among the posterity of Abraham. It is thus we see the fulfilment of the promise to that faithful man, *I will bless thee, and thou shalt be a blessing.*

But while these things afford pleasure to us, they must, methinks, have been very provoking to the jews; and happy had it been for them if they had been provoked to a godly jealousy. Many amongst them were far behind these strangers in knowledge and in faith, though they enjoyed very superior advantages. The Saviour was continually amongst them, crying, and calling at their gates, and at the entering in of their cities; yet they generally disregarded him: whereas in this case he only took an occasional journey, and that in secret, (for when he entered into an house, *he would have no man know it**) yet here this poor woman found him out, and presented her supplication. How true is that saying of our Lord, *The first shall be last, and the last first;* and how often do we still see persons of inferior advantages enter into the kingdom of God, before others who have possessed the greatest abundance of means.

* Mark vii. 24.

But what treatment did she receive from our Saviour on this her first application? *He answered her not a word.* Who would have expected this? Does it accord with his usual conduct? In what instance had he been known to refuse such an application? It was very mysterious, and very discouraging. Is his ear heavy then that it cannot hear; or his arm shortened that it cannot save? *Answered her not a word!* Who could understand this as any other than a repulse? If the faith of the petitioner had been weak, she might have concluded that he would not answer her because he could not help her. If her heart had been cold, she might have gone away as many do after having said their prayers, contented without the blessing. If her spirit had been haughty, she must and would have resented it, and have asked no more. In short, had she been any thing but what she was, great in faith, in love, and in humility, she would have turned away. And here we may see the wisdom of our Saviour's conduct: had he immediately granted her request, we had seen little or nothing of the exercise of these graces. But let us proceed.

Here is a *second* application made on her behalf; and this is by the disciples: they *came and besought him to send her away.* I hope they meant

that he would grant her her petition. One might have expected something considerable from the intercession of the twelve apostles. He had consented to go and heal the centurion's servant at the request of the jewish elders;* and surely his own disciples must have an interest with him equal to theirs. If the poor woman knew of their becoming her advocates, it is natural to suppose her expectations must have been raised; and this it is likely she did, for while they were speaking she seems to have held her peace. They need not have been at a loss neither for a precedent; for though she was a heathen, yet they had lately witnessed his kind attention to a Roman centurion; and had they pleaded this, he might have shewn mercy at their request. But to what does their intercession amount? Alas, it is mean and pitiful: it does not appear to have a spice of benevolence in it; but to have been merely the effect of self-love. *Send her away,* said they, *for she troubleth us!* O disciples! And does the voice of prayer *trouble* you? How little at present do you resemble your Master? We never read of *his* being troubled with the cry of the poor and needy. And this is all you have to urge, is it? Your charity amounts to just as much as that of some wealthy persons, who give a poor man a penny,

* Luke vii. 3—6.

not out of compassion, but in order to get rid of him!

What is the answer to this sorry petition? Our Lord takes no notice of the mercenary nature of the plea, and this was like *himself:* he often exercised a dignified forbearance towards them amidst their numerous faults. But what answer did he make? *I am not sent but to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.* It was true that his commission was especially directed to Israel; and previous to his resurrection, he even forbad his disciples to go *in the way of the gentiles*: nor is it any wonder that he should avail himself of this general truth, still to withhold his favour, rather than grant it at such a request as this. The motive which they had urged was not likely to work upon him.

But think how it must affect the poor petitioner. Silence was discouraging; but this must have been more so: that might be imputed to other causes. She might suppose he was considering of her request, and though he had said nothing in her favour, yet he had said nothing against her: but this is not only giving her a denial, but giving the *reason* of it, which would seem to render it irrevocable. To an eye of sense it would now seem to be a lost case. It is not so, however, to an eye of faith.

Let us proceed to the *third* application—The disciples had been poor advocates. Make way for her, and let her plead her own cause: she can do it best. It is not one, nor two repulses that will silence the prayer of faith; nor ought else, so long as Jesus lives, and the invitations and promises of his word continue unrevoked. It was written, *He shall save the needy when he crieth; the poor also, and him that hath no helper;* and the efficacy of this declaration must be tried again. *Then came she and worshipped him, saying, Lord help me!*

Observe, she prefaces her petition with an *act of worship.* She had before acknowledged him as David's Son, now she approaches him as his Lord. Prostrate at his feet, she adores him, and renews her supplication. It is short, but very full. It has but three words, but more than three ideas, and these full of importance. She here in effect tells him, that her case is urgent; that she is truly helpless; that no help is to be expected from any other quarter; that she is persuaded of his being able to save to the uttermost; and that it belongs to his character as Messiah to help those that have no helper. Though a Canaanite, assuredly she possesses the spirit of an Israelite: *I will not let thee go, except thou bless me.*

If there be such a thing as holy violence, or taking the kingdom of heaven, as it were, by force, surely this is it; and, knowing the character of Christ, we should have concluded that this petition must be successful. But *Jesus answered and said, It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs.* What imperfect judges are we of times and seasons. Just now we should have supposed her cause was gained, and yet it was not so; and now we should have been ready enough to conclude it was lost, and yet it is not so. Let us learn to wait patiently for the Lord, and neither conclude when we enjoy great fervour and freedom in our approaches to him, that our prayers must be answered immediately, or not at all; nor, when thrown back into darkness and discouragement, that now there is no hope. Had this poor woman rested her expectation on her own feelings, or on any thing short of the Lord's own word, she had fainted in this trying moment. What a crowd of thoughts might she at this time have cherished: hard thoughts, proud thoughts, and despairing thoughts. 'And is this the 'Messiah, of whom such glorious things are 'spoken? Is this the compassion that he is to 'exercise *to the poor, and to them that have no* '*helper?* No mercy, no help, for a stranger, 'even though prostrate at his feet; and, as if it

'were not enough to refuse his assistance, he, 'must call me a dog! I will ask no more: 'whatever be my lot, I will bear it!' Such might have been her reflexions, and such her conduct; but she was a believer, and faith operates in a different way.

Yet what could our Saviour mean by such language? Did he really intend to countenance that contemptuous spirit with which the carnal jews treated the gentiles? Surely not. Did he feel towards this poor stranger as his words would seem to indicate? No. His roughness, like that of Joseph towards his brethren, was assumed for the purpose of trying her; and she endures the trial with singular perseverance. She neither resents being called a dog, nor despairs on account of it; but is resolved still to follow up her suit. Yet what new plea can she find to offer?

Let us hear the *fourth* and last application—*Truth, Lord, but the dogs eat of the crumbs that fall from their master's table.* Most admirable! Such an instance of spiritual ingenuity, of holy and humble acumen, was perhaps never known before, nor since. Now the conflict is at an end; the victory is gained; the kingdom of heaven is taken by the prayer of faith. Jesus,

like Joseph, can refrain himself no longer; but appears in his true character. *O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt!* Let us review this charming crisis, and mark the ground from which this last and successful plea proceeded. IT WAS THE GROUND ON WHICH THE LORD HAD PLACED HER. He intimated that she was a dog, unworthy of the children's bread. She readily admitted it, and as a dog presented her petition. Here then is the grand secret how to succeed in our approaches for mercy. We must stand upon that ground where the scripture places us, and from thence present our petition. Does the Lord tell us in his word that we are guilty, unworthy, ungodly, deserving of eternal death? On this ground we must take our stand, and plead for that mercy that is provided for characters of this description. All applications for mercy on any other ground will be unsuccessful.

The last answer of Jesus, as well as the last prayer of the woman, is worthy of special notice. There are three things remarkable in it: the commendation of her faith, the granting of her desire, and the affectionate manner in which both were addressed to her.

Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, great is thy faith! This accords with his gene-

ral practice. The blessings of healing, as well as those of a more spiritual nature, were ordinarily suspended on believing; and when obtained, were ascribed to it. Hence such language as this: *If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth—Thy faith hath saved thee—Thy faith hath made thee whole.* Did our Lord by this language mean to give away the honour of salvation from himself? No, it is not used for the purpose of transferring honour to us, but for giving encouragement to faith. Neither is there any opposition of interests between Christ and faith: those who are saved by faith are saved by Christ; for it is of the nature of faith to go out of itself, and draw all from him. Christ's power and grace operate as the cause of our salvation, faith as the mean of it: yet, being a mean absolutely necessary for the bringing of Christ and the soul together, as well as for the promotion of all other graces, it is constantly held up as the one thing needful.

Perhaps if we had commended the Canaanitish woman, we should have admired her great importunity, and great humility: but our Lord passes over these, taking notice only of her faith; and wherefore? Because faith was the root or principle from whence the others sprang, and by which they were kept alive.

Our Lord often commended the faith of believers; but I recollect but two instances in which he speaks of it as being *great;* and they are both of them gentiles: one is the Roman centurion, and the other the woman of whom we are discoursing. There doubtless was an eminency, or peculiar strength in the faith of each of them; but that which more than any thing rendered it great in our Lord's account, was the *disadvantages* under which it was exercised. To Israel pertained the *promises.* If gentiles partook of the root and fatness of the olive tree, it was by being grafted into it, *contrary to nature.* Yet amidst these disadvantages, they abound in faith, which, for the degree of it, was not to be found in Israel. Thus we are often provoked to jealousy. Persons whose religious advantages have been small compared with ours, are nevertheless before us in faith, and love, and heavenly-mindedness. Thus it is that the pride of man is stained, and no flesh suffered to glory in the divine presence.

Having commended her faith, our Saviour proceeds to *grant her desire—Be it unto thee even as thou wilt.* The Lord does not excite a willing mind with a view finally to cross it, or an earnestness of desire in order to disappoint it: such willingness and such desire, therefore,

are indicative of his designs. Christ only can satisfy the desires of the mind; and christians are the only men in the world whose desires are satisfied. Cesar, in the full possession of empire, is said to have exclaimed, "Is this all?" And such is the disappointment that every sinner will meet with who sets his heart on any thing but Christ. It is not in the power of the whole creation to say to an immortal guilty creature, *Be it unto thee even as thou wilt:* but Jesus hath the words of eternal life.

The *tender and affectionate manner* in which our Saviour commended the faith, and fulfilled the desire of the poor petitioner, is deserving also of remark. It is introduced with an interjection, *O, woman!* In the lips of a speaker abounding in affectation, such words signify but little: but Jesus never affected to feel when he did not. Whenever therefore an interjection is seen in his speeches, we may be certain he felt. He felt *compassion* towards her on account of her affliction; but chiefly *admiration* and *delight* on witnessing the peculiar energy of her faith. Thus he *marvelled* at the Roman centurion.* The genuine, and especially the eminent exercises of grace, are more than any thing the delight of Christ's heart. In looking at the poor

* Matt. viii. 10.

and contrite spirit, he overlooks heaven and earth.*

It may be rather surprising to us that our Saviour should hold this poor woman so long in suspense: but if he had not, her graces would not have been so apparent, and the exercise of them so grateful to him. And thus we may account for many of the afflictions through which the Lord brings his servants. If tribulation worketh patience, and patience experience, and experience hope; and if the exercise of these graces be of greater account in his esteem than our present ease, it is not surprising that he should prefer the former to the latter: and this consideration should reconcile us to those providences which for a time hold us in painful suspense.

From the whole we may remark, that genuine, yea, great grace, may be exercised in respect of temporal mercies. It was not for the salvation of her soul, or the soul of her daughter, that this poor woman was so importunate; but for the removal of an affliction. Yet such was the grace which was exercised in it, that there is no doubt of her being eternally saved. The exercise of spirituality is not confined to the

* Isai. lxvi. 1, 2.

seeking of spiritual blessings. We may serve the Lord in our daily avocations; and it is essential to true religion that we do so. Such prayer may be offered, and such faith exercised, in respect of our daily bread, as have the promise of everlasting life.

Finally: If our Saviour suffered himself to be overcome by one who sought for a temporal blessing, much more will he accept of those who come to him for such as are spiritual and eternal. His promises are much stronger in the one case than in the other. Though there were several general intimations that the Messiah would exercise compassion towards the bodies, as well as the souls of men; and the numerous miracles which he wrought afforded full proof of his readiness to do good in every way: yet he no where bound himself, that I recollect, to heal *all* that came to him. I believe he never sent away an individual without a cure: but still he seems to have reserved to himself a kind of discretional power to do so. But in matters of everlasting moment, the word is gone out of his lips—*Him that cometh unto me, I will* IN NO WISE CAST OUT. Here every one that seeketh findeth, and to him that knocketh, we are assured by the keeper of the gate, that it shall be opened. If any man therefore be hereafter shut out of

the kingdom of heaven, it will appear in the end, that he sought not after it in the present life; or at least that he sought it not by faith.

We shall all be importunate sooner or later: but importunity will one day be unavailing! Many will then seek to enter in, and shall not be able. Yea, they will cry earnestly, saying, *Lord, Lord, open unto us! We have eaten and drank in thy presence, and thou hast taught in our streets:—but he shall answer, Depart from me, ye workers of iniquity!* O my hearers, let us agonise to enter in at the strait gate! All the zeal and earnestness which we may feel in other things, is spending our money for that which is not bread, and our labour for that which satisfieth not. Incline your ear, and come unto him; hear, and your souls shall live; and he will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David.

THE FUTURE PERFECTION OF THE CHURCH CONTRASTED WITH ITS PRESENT IMPERFECTIONS.

SERMON IV.

EPHES. V. 25—27.

Christ loved the church, and gave himself for it: that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word; that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy, and without blemish.

IT is a distinguishing character in the apostolic writings, that motives to the most ordinary duties are fetched from the doctrine of the cross. Who but an apostle would have thought of enforcing affection in a husband to a wife from the love of Christ to his church? We are undoubtedly hereby taught to act in the common affairs of life from christian principle: and I am inclined to think, that our personal christianity is more manifested in this way than

in any other. It is not by a holiness put on on religious occasions, as we put on our Lord's-day dress, that we shall prove ourselves to be christians: but by that which is habitual, and which without our so much as designing it, will spontaneously appear in our language and behaviour. If the apostle's heart had not been full of Christ, he would have thought of other motives than this: but this being uppermost, presented itself on all occasions. We may be thankful that it was so on this, especially; for we are hereby furnished with a most interesting and affecting view of the salvation of sinners, a salvation originating in the love of Christ, and terminating in their being presented to him, without spot, and blameless.

Three things require our attention: namely, the character of the church when the designs of mercy shall be fulfilled upon her—the causes to which it is ascribed—and the honour for which it is intended to prepare her.

I. THE CHARACTER OF THE CHURCH WHEN THE DESIGNS OF MERCY SHALL BE FULFILLED UPON HER—"A glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but holy, and without blemish." We are at no loss to perceive the meaning of the term "church" in

this connexion. It is manifestly put for the whole assembly of the saved, elsewhere called *the church of the first-born, whose names are written in heaven.* It is denominated "glorious," through the glory which Christ shall have put upon it; and which, it is intimated, will consist in a freedom from every imperfection, and the consummation of purity, or holy beauty.

In the description here given, the apostle has, no doubt, an eye to the church in its different states, as *fallen*, as *renewed*, and as *perfected.* In the first it is supposed to have been defiled, so as to need "sanctifying and cleansing:" and even in the second to have many things which diminish its beauty; such as "spots and wrinkles:" but in the last it shall be "a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing;" or, speaking more literally, "holy, and without blemish."

We conceive but very imperfectly of a state of perfection. An apostle acknowledged, *We know not what we shall be.* Indeed, it is at present but very sparingly revealed; and if it were otherwise, our minds, naturally weak, and greatly enfeebled by the remains of indwelling sin, would be unable to sustain a direct view of it. We can better conceive what it is *not*, than what it is.

The apostle himself writes as if he could not fully conceive of the immaculate state of the church: but he could say what it was *not*, or that it would be *without* those spots and wrinkles which at present attended it, and was a great diminution of its beauty. As this then was the apostle's manner of contemplating the future glory of the church, let it be ours.

I shall not go about to compare the church perfected with what it was antecedent to its being sanctified and cleansed in virtue of Christ's having given himself for it; for in that view it admits of no comparison: but with what it is at present, notwithstanding; that is, the subject of many imperfections.

Spots suppose a loveliness of character upon the whole, though in themselves they are unlovely. They could not with propriety have been attributed to the church while she remained unsanctified; for then she was altogether polluted. The same may be said of *imperfections*. It is improper to attribute them to unconverted sinners. Such characters will often acknowledge themselves to have their imperfections; but in truth they thereby pay themselves a compliment which does not belong to them. Imperfection supposes the mind to be engaged in the pursuit

of perfection, though it has not as yet attained it. Spots and imperfections then are properly attributed to the church in its present state; inferring a general loveliness of character, though they are in themselves unlovely. Whatever has tended to deface it, or to detract from its holy beauty, that is to be reckoned amongst its spots.

How much then, in the first place, has the beauty of Christ's church been defaced by *false doctrines*, and the strifes and divisions which have followed upon them. While we are of the apostle's mind, determined to know nothing but Christ and him crucified, we shall not be in danger of deviating very widely from the truth in any of its branches: but if this pole-star be lost sight of, we shall soon fall upon the rocks of error. Paul, and his fellow apostles, inspired as they were, could not maintain the purity of all the churches. The number of worldly men who obtrude themselves upon the church; some in the character of members, and others in that of ministers, together with the tendency to err which is found even in believers themselves, too easily accounts for the same things in that and every succeeding age. When the gospel was addressed to the jews, many of them believed; but amongst their leaders, there were men whose minds were not subdued to the obedience of

Christ. 'Christianity, (said they) is very good 'so far as it goes; but it is *defective*. It grates 'with our feelings who have been used to so 'much religious pomp. Circumcision, and a 'few of our decent ceremonies, would compleat 'it.'—So also when the gospel was addressed to the learned greeks, some of them believed; but amongst them were men who wanted to supply some of its supposed defects. 'Christianity, '(said they) is good so far as it goes; but 'it wants a little philosophy to be added to it, 'and the whole to be cast into a philosophical 'mould; and then it will be respectable, and 'worthy of being the religion of the whole 'human race.'

But what said the apostle to the churches in respect of these proposals? Hear him. "As "ye have received Christ Jesus the Lord, "so walk ye in him. Rooted, and built up in "him, and established in the faith as ye have "been taught, abounding therein with thanks-"giving. Beware lest any man spoil you "through philosophy and vain deceit, after the "tradition of men, after the rudiments of the "world, and not after Christ. For in him dwell-"eth all the FULNESS of the Godhead bodily. "And ye are COMPLEAT in him, who is the "head of all principalities and powers . . . In

" him also ye are *circumcised* with the circum-
" cision made without hands, in putting off the
" body of the sins of the flesh by the circumci-
" sion of Christ. Buried with him in baptism,
" wherein also you are risen with him through
" the faith of the operation of God, who hath
" raised him from the dead. And you, being
" dead in your sins, and the uncircumcision of
" your flesh, hath he quickened together with
" him, having forgiven you all trespasses. Blot-
" ting out the hand-writing of ordinances which
" was contrary to us, and took it out of the way,
" nailing it to his cross: and having spoiled
" principalities and powers, he made a shew of
" them openly, triumphing over them in it.
" LET NO MAN THEREFORE JUDGE YOU in
" meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holy
" day, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath
" days: which are a shadow of things to come,
" but the body is Christ. LET NO MAN BE-
" GUILE YOU OF YOUR REWARD in a voluntary
" humility, and worshipping of angels, intrud-
" ing into those things which he hath not seen,
" vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind; and not
" holding the head, from which all the body
" by joints and bands having nourishment mi-
" nistered, and knit together, increaseth with
" the increase of God." Col. ii.

Had the church of Christ adhered to this counsel, it had been free from many spots which have since defaced it: but it has not. In every age there have been men of corrupt minds, who have followed the example of these *philosophizing* and *judaizing* teachers, in their attempts to render the doctrine of Christ more *compleat;* that is, more congenial to the wishes of their own hearts; and the church has in too many instances been carried away by them. Some have degraded the dignity of Christ, and thereby undermined his sacrifice; others have disowned the freeness of his grace; and others have turned it into licentiousness. Behold how at this day the beauty of the church is marred by these anti-christian principles, and the strifes which ensue upon them. One denomination or society sees the spots upon the face of another, and is employed in exposing them, instead of removing those upon its own; while the impartial eye must perceive, that deviations from the simplicity of the gospel are, in different degrees, to be found in all.

Blessed be God who hath given us to expect a day when the church shall be freed from all this deformity; when the watchmen shall see eye to eye; when the people of God, now di-

vided into parties, shall be of one heart and of one soul; when neither discordance nor defect shall attend their researches; and when we shall all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.

How much also has the beauty of Christ's church been defaced by superstitious and unscriptural *worship*. The method of *compleating* christianity by the addition of a number of decent ceremonies, first practised by the judaizing teachers, has been acted over and over again. The introduction of such things in the three first centuries, made way for the grand papal apostasy; and spots of this kind remain upon the faces of many protestant communities to this day. The nearer we approach to the simplicity of primitive worship the better. The meretricious ornaments of man's invention may adorn the mother of harlots; but they are blemishes to the bride of Christ. They are the wood, hay, and stubble of the building, which later builders have laid upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets; and which, when the day shall come that shall declare every man's work of what sort it is, will be burnt up.

Finally: The beauty of Christ's church has been greatly defaced by the *impure lives* of great numbers of its members. I do not now refer to the immoral practices of all that have been called christians, as a large proportion of them cannot be said to have deserved the name. I refer to those only who have either been christians indeed, or at least received and treated as such by those who were so. The evils which have prevailed amongst them have been great, and still furnish matter of shame and grief in all the churches. The primitive churches themselves, especially some of them, had many spots of this description. And it is worthy of notice, that those who most departed from the doctrine of Christ, such as the *Corinthians*, the *Galatians*, and the *Hebrews*, were most faulty in matters of practice. The evil communications of some of their teachers tended to corrupt good manners. The same causes continue also to produce the same effects. Those congregations where the pure doctrine of the cross is relinquished, whether it be in favour of what is called morality on the one hand, or high notions of orthodoxy on the other, are commonly distinguished by the laxness of their conduct. Many of the former, by a conformity to the genteel vices of the world, have nearly lost all pretences to christianity; and many of the latter, by their oppo-

sition to practical preaching, and neglect of christian discipline, have been offensive to common decency. Nor is this all: even the purest communities have their spots. Individuals are chargeable with things for which the good ways of God are evil spoken of; and they that have been enabled to maintain a fair character in the eyes of men, have nevertheless much alienation of heart, and many faults to acknowledge and bewail before God.

We are given, however, to believe that it will not be thus always. The church will not only see better days before the end of time; but ere she is presented to her Lord, shall be entirely purified. *The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all* THINGS *that offend, and* THEM *that do iniquity: and* THEN SHALL THE RIGHTEOUS SHINE FORTH LIKE THE SUN IN THE KINGDOM OF THEIR FATHER.*

Another term by which the present imperfections of the church are expressed, is that of *wrinkles*. These, as well as spots, are inconsistent with perfect beauty. They are signs of the decay of life, and health, and vigour: hence they are the ordinary symptoms of old age, or of an enfeebled constitution. Surely a more

* Matt. xiii. 41—43.

appropriate term could not have been chosen for expressing those *spiritual declensions to which the church in its present state is continually subject.* The church at Ephesus during her *first love* resembled a virgin in the bloom of youthful beauty; but when she left it, and with it her *first works,* she became as a woman bowed down by age, and covered with wrinkles. In this church we see what the church in general is, compared with what it was in the primitive ages; what protestants are, compared with what they were at the Reformation; what protestant dissenters are, compared with the puritans and nonconformists; and what many congregational churches are, compared with what they have been at certain periods. I need not enlarge on these particulars: your own reflections are sufficient to convince you that great numbers of each description are in a wrinkled or decayed state. There is indeed a strong and perpetual tendency in us to declension. Things which have formerly been interesting and impressive, will, if we do not habitually walk with God, lose their influence. We shall read of the zeal of the apostles, of the martyrs, and of other christian worthies: but we shall not feel it. On the contrary, we shall seem to be reading of men whom we cannot but admire, but whom we know not how to imitate.

How cheering is the thought that the time is coming when these spots and wrinkles will be no more; but the church, and every individual member of it, shall be "*holy and without blemish.*"

Holy beauty, in every stage and degree of it, is lovely. The character given to that generation of the Israelites which grew up in the wilderness, and which, warned by the crimes and punishments of its predecessors, clave in great numbers to the Lord, is charming. *Thus saith the* LORD, *I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals, when thou wentest after me in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown. Israel was holiness unto the* LORD, *and the first fruits of his increase: all that devour him shall offend; evil shall come upon them, saith the Lord.** It was then that Balaam endeavoured in vain to curse them; and that instead of cursing he was constrained to bless them. Like an old debauchee, awed by the dignity of virtue, he was compelled to desist, and even to admire the object which he could not imitate. *How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob, and thy tabernacles, O Israel—Let me die the death of the righteous; and let my last end be like his!* Such, I may say, was the youthful beauty of the jewish

* Jer. ii. 2, 3.

church; and that of the christian church was still greater. To read the Acts of the apostles, and to see the faith, the love, the zeal, the disinterestedness, the diligence, and the patience of the first disciples, is very affecting. It was then that they continued stedfastly in the apostles doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers; that great grace was upon them all; and that having believed in Jesus, they rejoiced in being thought worthy to suffer for his name.—But lovely as both the jewish and christian churches were; neither of them could vie with the church made perfect. The disparity between the highest degrees of holiness and a state of sinless perfection, is inconceivable. The deliverance of the captives from mere temporal thraldom, and which was only the *effect* of sin, was so overcoming, that they were *like those that dream*, scarcely believing themselves to be what and where they were: but for the church of God, in full remembrance of its foul revolts, to feel itself "holy and without blemish," is an idea too great for sinful creatures to comprehend.

If any imagine this language to be too strong, and that sinless perfection, or what is near to it, has been attained by many in the present life, I would recommend them to con-

sider, that to be "holy and without blemish," is different according to the different kinds and degrees of light in which it is viewed. A vessel may be clean if viewed in a dim light, and very foul if viewed in a clear one. Thus a character may be "holy and without blemish" if viewed only in the light of selfish partiality, or even by the partiality of friendship; nay, if he be a recluse, the prejudice of an enemy may not be able to detect his faults: but place him before the tribunal of GOD; set his secret sins in the light of HIS countenance, and the decision will be different. To be presented holy and without blemish, is to be so *in* HIS *sight*. Such is the idea conveyed by the words of Jude: *Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless* BEFORE THE PRESENCE OF HIS GLORY, *with exceeding joy.*—To be faultless in the presence of an earthly judge, especially of one distinguished by his keenness and impartiality, is no small matter: but to be so in HIS presence to whom all things are known, implies a change far surpassing every thing experienced among mortals.

The low ideas which some persons entertain of sinless perfection, may be owing in part to their considering it chiefly in a *negative* point of view. Feeling, it may be, very little positive

desire after their evil courses, they begin to think they have not sinned for such a length of time, and consequently, are now nearly, if not altogether perfect. But perfection does not consist merely in a cessation from evil, which is no more than may be ascribed to animals: but in the love of God, with all the heart, and soul, and mind, and strength, and of our neighbours as ourselves. The state to which the church shall be brought before she is presented to her Lord, is that of being not only "without blemish," but "*holy* and without blemish."

In that perfect state we shall be unreservedly *devoted to the Lord.* No more shall the mind be betrayed by the illusive reasonings of men, to listen to God-dishonouring principles. No more shall it lose sight of Christ in the maze of its own researches. The blandishments of the world shall no more seduce the heart; nor hope, nor fear, nor shame, divert the feet from the path of rectitude. No more shall slothfulness, or any kind of sinful indulgence, unnerve the soul in its labours for God. No more shall the flesh lust against the spirit, nor the spirit have to struggle with the flesh. No more shall our half-hearted services render it doubtful to ourselves or others on whose side we are. In a word, *There the Lord's servants* SHALL SERVE HIM!

The multitude, in that perfect state, will also, *in respect of each other*, be of one heart, and of one soul. No discordant sentiments divide them; no unkind behaviours grieve them; no bitter strifes interrupt their harmony; no slights, misunderstandings, misconstructions, hard thoughts, or cutting words have place amongst them; no giving, or taking offence; no opposition of interests; no selfishness; no envies, jealousies, backbitings, whisperings, swellings, tumults; all is sweet peace and love. Bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, with all malice, are for ever put away from amongst them. In him that loved and gave himself for them all hearts are one.

This leads us to consider,

II. THE CAUSES TO WHICH ALL THIS IS ASCRIBED—"Christ loved the church, and gave himself for it, that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word." I think it not improbable that the apostle may allude to the parable concerning the jewish church in the sixteenth chapter of Ezekiel. The substance of it is this:—A female infant, the fruit perhaps of an illicit connexion, (whose wretched parent, in order to hide her shame,

had gone into the fields to be delivered) was discovered by a humane prince who happened to be passing that way at the time. He looked at the perishing babe, and pitied it. 'I will save thy life, said he; and as thou art fatherless and motherless, I will be both father and mother to thee, and thou shalt be mine.' He then washed, and clothed her; and, taking her to his palace, gave her an education suited to his intentions, which in fact were, at a proper time, to marry her. On her arriving at years of maturity, he carried his design into execution; she became his wife, and the crown royal was placed upon her head.

Look at this representation, and at his conduct who "loved the church, and gave himself for it, that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish" —Look, I say, at both these representations, and judge if the one has not some reference to the other.

There are three things to which the salvation of the church is here ascribed, namely, the *love* of Christ, the *sacrifice* of Christ, and the *word* of Christ.

First: For the accomplishment of so great a deliverance, it was necessary that Christ should "*love* the church." The thought of this is overwhelming. His wisdom, and power, and majesty, may induce us to admire and adore him; but to think of his *loving* sinful men, excites amazement.

There are several properties pertaining to the love of Christ which require to be taken into the account, if we would form any thing like a just view of it. Love may be founded upon *character*. Christ himself speaks of loving his disciples on this account. *If ye keep my commandments*, saith he, *ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love.** But that of which we are discoursing could not be founded upon any thing of this kind; for its object is supposed to be altogether polluted. He loved his church, and gave himself for it, not because it was sanctified and cleansed, or in view of its being so; but "*that he might* sanctify and cleanse it."—Again, Love towards an unworthy object is in common no other than *general benevolence*. Such was that compassion which our Saviour felt when he wept over Jerusalem; and such that "good will towards men," of which his being born into

* John xv. 10.

the world was an expression. God's giving his only-begotten Son to be made a sacrifice, and declaring that "whosoever believeth in him shall not perish, but have everlasting life," was a great expression of divine goodness towards sinners, whether they believe and be saved or not. But the love which Christ is said to have borne to *the church* was *discriminating*, and *effectual* to its salvation. The church is supposed to have been given him of the Father, to be unto him as a bride to a husband, and ultimately the reward of his undertaking. The love of Christ therefore in this connexion can be no other than *electing* love, and the passage may be considered as parallel with that at the beginning of the epistle, "He hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy, and without blame before him in love."

Secondly: For the accomplishment of the church's redemption it was necessary that Christ should *give himself a sacrifice.* In this way his love must operate, or be ineffectual. We are now, my brethren, upon the most interesting part of the most interesting subject that was ever presented to men or angels. It was this on which Paul wrote so feelingly—*The life I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who* LOVED ME, AND GAVE HIMSELF

FOR ME. It was this that furnished John with his affecting doxology—*Unto him that* LOVED US, AND WASHED US FROM OUR SINS IN HIS OWN BLOOD—*to Him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.* It is this that furnishes the church in heaven with its *new song—Thou art worthy*—FOR THOU WAST SLAIN, AND HAST REDEEMED US TO GOD BY THY BLOOD, *out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation.**

But wherefore must our Redeemer "give *himself* for us?" Would nothing short of life suffice? Nothing. We, as transgressors, being justly exposed to eternal death, must have borne our iniquity, had he not offered himself as a substitute in our place, life for life. Some who profess to believe in the atonement, have hesitated, from I know not what kind of modesty, to maintain the *necessity* of it in order to forgiveness; alleging, that it does not become us to say what God could, or could not have done. But does it become us, when he hath in effect declared any thing to be inconsistent with his perfections, to question whether it might not nevertheless be admissible. Why did not the cup pass from him, when with strong cries and tears to God, he besought that IF IT WERE

* Gal. ii. 20. Rev. i. 5, 6. v. 9.

POSSIBLE it might do so? It is true, it *pleased* the Lord to bruise him; but surely not without a necessity for it! If mercy could have been manifested consistently with justice, without his suffering, surely the cup would have passed from him! Whoever had been given up to be made a curse, God would have spared his own Son! But in bringing many sons to glory, it BECAME him for whom are all things—to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings. To give up the necessity of atonement is half giving up the thing; and the half which remains will have but little effect on our hearts, or on the tenor of our labours.

The connexion in which the death of Christ is here introduced, namely, as being *for his church*, or which is the same thing, for his elect people, teaches us that all which he did and suffered was with a view to their salvation. The invitations of the gospel, it is true, are addressed to sinners as sinners; and I believe it to be equally true that such invitations are founded in the *sufficiency* of Christ's atonement for the pardon of all the sins of the whole world, were they to believe in him: but if we will allow the scriptures to speak out on all occasions, and form our principles by them, taken as a whole, we must conclude that it was his *intention*, *design*,

or *purpose*, to save those, and only those by it, who were given to him of the Father. In other words, it never was his intention to impart faith, and other succeeding benefits, to any other than his elect. *Whom he did predestinate, them he also called.* We are *saved and called, not according to our works; but according to his own purpose and grace, given us in Christ Jesus before the world began.**

I am aware that many objections might here be raised; but I am also aware that they all rest upon the principle, *that divine predestination and human agency cannot be consistent, unless they appear to be so to us.* This I do not believe. It did not belong to Moses to explain *how* the messages of peace to *Pharaoh* and *Sihon* were consistent with the purpose of God to destroy them: but I suppose he believed they were so, because the same being, (and who could not do wrong) ordered the former, and declared the latter. Neither does it belong to me to shew *how* a limitation of design with respect to the persons who shall be ultimately benefited by the death of Christ, is consistent with universal invitations: but I believe it to be so, because he that has ordered the one has in effect declared the other. Vain men may ask, "Why then

* Rom. viii. 30. 2 Tim. i. 9.

doth he yet find fault; for who hath resisted his will?" But if instead of "replying against God," they were to throw themselves at the feet of sovereign mercy, and seek forgiveness in the name of Jesus, it would turn to a better account.

Thirdly: For the accomplishment of the church's salvation, it requires that it should be "sanctified and cleansed," by faith in the *word* of God.—The latter of these terms frequently denotes the removal of sin as to its condemning, as well as its defiling influence. The blood of Christ operates in both ways; and the faith of him, in different respects, both justifies and sanctifies. As the process however seems principally to refer to the *meetening* of the church by a gradual encrease of holy beauty, the terms "sanctify and cleanse," may in this place convey much the same idea. It never was the Lord's design to save his people in their sins, but from them. Sanctification therefore is an essential branch of salvation. The word, especially the word of the gospel, truly believed, is the laver in which the sinner is washed from his uncleanness. He may have heretofore yielded a traditional assent to it, and remained a slave to his lusts notwithstanding: but when, being convinced of sin by a view of the divine law,

he receives it not as the word of men, but (as it is in truth) the word of God, it worketh *effectually in him.** He may have made many attempts at cleansing himself while under the power of unbelief: but every thing of this kind was ineffectual, and left him fouler in the sight of God than it found him. And well it might, for it was going, as it were, to Abana and Pharpar, in contempt of the waters of Jordan. Till therefore the sinner, renewed in the spirit of his mind, is brought to relinquish all confidences but that of Christ, his attempts at holiness are but wearying himself with very vanity.

There is, it is observable, a marked *connexion* in this, as well as in many other passages, between the sacrifice of Christ and the sanctification of his people. He "gave himself for the church, *that he might* sanctify and cleanse it." Had not Christ laid down his life, there had been no holiness among the fallen sons of Adam, no gospel laver to wash in, nor any such thing as sanctification of the Spirit: all had continued in their uncleanness. It had been as inconsistent with the perfections of God to have given his holy Spirit to a sinner, as to have pardoned his sins, or bestowed upon him any other spiritual blessing. But having sacrificed his life, and that

* 1 Thess. ii. 13.

under a promise, the effectual grace of God not only may be imparted consistently with justice, but the communication of it is rendered certain, in that it is a part of the promised reward. Hence it is represented as the *fruit* or *effect* of his death. Believers are the *seed* which he was to see; the *travail* of his soul, which should yield him a satisfaction like that of a mother who remembereth no more the anguish, for joy that a man is born into the world.

It is on this principle that our Lord, in view of the unbelief of the jewish nation, thus speaks in prophecy—*I said I have laboured in vain, and have spent my strength for nought, and in vain;* YET SURELY MY JUDGMENT IS WITH JEHOVAH, AND MY WORK WITH MY GOD. As if he should say, 'Whether Israel be gathered, or not, I shall 'be rewarded. My work is before God, the 'Judge of all, who will not suffer it to fall to the 'ground. If Israel be lost, their loss will be to 'themselves; it shall be more than made up to 'me from amongst the gentiles.'*

To render manifest this *connexion*, it was ordered in the divine counsels that an extraordinary measure of the Holy Spirit should be poured

* Isai. xlix. 4—12.

out immediately after the sacrifice was offered: and lest the cause of it should be overlooked, our Saviour expressly declared, that if he went not away, the Comforter would not come; but that if he went he would send him, and that he should convince the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment. This was the appointed time for great numbers of the jews to be convinced of their unbelief, as well as for the gentiles to be converted and given to Christ as the reward of his death. Things were thus connected in order of time, that they might appear to be connected in order of nature; or that one might appear to be what it actually was, the effect of the other.

Add to this, The death of Christ is not only a procuring cause of sanctification, but as a doctrine it operates to the producing of it. Hence the same effects are ascribed to the washing of water by the word, and to the blood of the Lamb. The atonement offered was that in *virtue* of which we are sanctified; and the atonement preached and believed is the *mean* of its accomplishment. We are "sanctified by the faith that is in him.

I proceed to notice,

III. THE HONOUR FOR WHICH THIS GRACE TOWARDS THE CHURCH IS INTENDED TO PREPARE

IT—"That he might present it to himself." There is no doubt but the term here alludes to the presenting of an espoused virgin to her husband. Under this imagery the scriptures are wont to represent the different joyful advances of the church towards perfection. Like as the destruction of Jerusalem, and the overthrow of the heathen empire of Rome, are described in language applicable to the last judgment,* intimating that they would be to the parties concerned, days of judgment in miniature; so the different advances of the church towards perfection are described in language applicable to a state of perfection itself. Thus the conversion of sinners is represented as an "espousal of them to one husband, that they might be presented as a chaste virgin to Christ."† The conversion of the gentiles to Christ is also thus described—"Hearken, O daughter, and consider, and incline thine ear; forget also thine own people and thy father's house. So shall the king greatly desire thy beauty: for he is thy Lord, and worship thou him—The king's daughter is all glorious within; her clothing is of wrought gold. She shall be brought unto the king in raiment of needle-work: the virgins her companions that follow her shall be brought unto thee. With gladness and re-

*Matt. xxiv. 29—31. Rev. vi. 12—17. † 2 Cor. xi. 2.

joicing shall they be brought: they shall enter into the king's palace."* Under the same imagery seems to be represented the great conversions to Christ in the latter day. Immediately after the fall of Babylon, the voice of a great multitude is heard in heaven, saying, "Alleluia: for the Lord God Omnipotent reigneth! Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him; for *the marriage of the Lamb is come*, and his wife hath made herself ready. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in white linen, clean and white: for the white linen is the righteousness of saints. And he saith unto me, Write, *Blessed are they that are called to the marriage-supper of the Lamb*. These are the true sayings of God."†

On each of these occasions there is a partial presentation of the church to Christ; and all are preparatory to that universal and perfect one which shall take place at the end of time.

But there seems to be something singular in the idea of Christ's *presenting the church to himself*. The work of presenting the bride, we should suppose, properly belongs to her parent. But how if she had no parent, but like the orphan before described, was cast out without an eye to

* Psalm xlv. † Rev. xix. 6—9.

pity, or a hand to help her? In this case the bridegroom must himself be her father, and perform the work of a father throughout, even to the presenting of her to himself. If such be the allusion, it represents in an affecting light the forlorn condition that we were in as under the fall; and teaches us that in every stage of our salvation we must remember it, in order to heighten our love to Christ.

The perfection of bliss that will succeed to this presentation, is beyond all our present conceptions. Suffice it to say, that Christ will be the sum and substance of it. We have already noticed the glory of the church as being freed from her spots and blemishes; but this, though a great blessing, is chiefly negative. Besides this, there is a positive source of enjoyment in an uninterrupted and endless communion with her Lord and Saviour. To be "able to comprehend the breadth and length, and depth and height of the love of Christ, and so to be filled with all the fulness of God," is the mark on which saints on earth are directed to keep their eye; but to attain it is reserved for saints in heaven. Nor shall they so comprehend it as to leave no room for continued researches: for how shall they perfectly know that which *passeth knowledge*?

Finally: It is observable that under the figure of being admitted to a marriage-feast, or excluded from it, we see what will shortly be the test of us all. *At midnight there was a cry made, Behold the bridegroom cometh, go ye out to meet him; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage, and the door was shut.* If there be any thing of importance in this world, it is to be *ready* when the Lord cometh: not by such preparations as sinners are apt to flee to when their fears are alarmed; but by believing in the Son of God, and keeping his commandments. Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners. Look off from every other dependence, and put your trust in him. He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him. Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning; and ye yourselves like unto men that wait for the Lord—Blessed are those servants whom the Lord, when he cometh, shall find watching!

THE GOSPEL THE ONLY EFFECTUAL MEAN OF PRODUCING UNIVERSAL PEACE AMONG MANKIND.

SERMON V.

MALACHI iv. 5, 6.

Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet, before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord. And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse.

MALACHI the last of the Old Testament prophets lived in an age of great degeneracy, and much of his prophecy is taken up in bearing testimony against it. The two last chapters however, inform us of a remnant who feared the Lord, and thought upon his name. Partly for their encouragement, and partly for the awakening of the careless, he introduces the coming of the Messiah, and intimates that the very next who should be sent would be his harbinger.

That we may understand the passage first read, I shall offer a few observations upon it.

1. John the Baptist is here called "Elijah the prophet," because he would be as it were another Elijah; resembling him not only in his austerity, and general appearance,* but in the spirit and power with which he preached. *And many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God. And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elias, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.*†

2. The coming of Christ is called "that great and terrible day of the Lord." This may seem to disagree with the general current of prophecy. It is common for the prophets to represent this great event as a source of unusual joy, and to call not men only, but the very inanimate creation to join in it. The truth is, the same event which afforded joy to those who received him brought desolation and destruction to those who received him not. It is in this light that the prophet represents it in chapter iii. 2.—"Who may abide the day of his coming, and who shall stand when he appeareth?' And the fact was,

* Compare 2 Kings i. 8, with Matt. iii. 4. † Luke i. 16, 17.

that for their rejection of him, such tribulations came upon them as "were not since the begin-" ning of the world to that time, and would never " be again." This was the *day* referred to in ver. 1, which should "burn as an oven; when all " the proud, and all that should do wickedly " would be stubble; the day that should burn " them up, and leave them neither root nor " branch."

3. It is intimated that previous to the ministry of John there would be great dissensions, and bitter animosities among the jewish people; parents at variance with their children, and children with their parents; altogether producing such a state of society, that, if there had been no change for the better, the land might have been smitten with a curse sooner than it was. Subjugated by the Romans, one part of the nation, for the sake of private interest, sided with them, and accepted places under them, by which they became odious in the eyes of the other. Some became soldiers under the Roman standard, and treated their brethren with violence; others became publicans, or farmers of the public taxes, entering deeply into a system of oppression. A spirit of selfishness pervaded all ranks and orders of men, prompting those on one side to deeds of oppres-

sion, and those on the other to discontent and bitter antipathies. Besides this, they were divided into a number of religious sects, which bore the most inveterate hatred to one another, and were all far off from truth and godliness.

4. It is predicted that John's ministry should have a conciliating influence, turning men's hearts one to another, and so tending to avert the curse which hung over them. Such were actually the effects of it. Nor were they accomplished by merely an interference between the parties, or by labouring to produce a mere outward reformation; but by first turning them to God, through Jesus Christ. Hence Luke, in quoting the words of Malachi, connects the *turning of the fathers to the children* with the *turning of the hearts of the disobedient to the wisdom of the just*, and the *making ready a people prepared for the Lord.** John's errand was to call sinners to repentance, adding withal, *that they should believe in him that should come after him.* And wherever this effect was produced, a new bond of union existed, and former antipathies were forgotten. The exhortations also which he gave to them who repented and applied for baptism were such as struck at every species of selfishness, and tended to produce peace and unanimity a-

* Luke i. 17.

mongst men. He called for *fruits meet for repentance.* "The *people* asked him, What shall "we do then? He answered and said, He that "hath two coats, let him impart to him that "hath none; and he that hath meat, let him do "likewise. Then came also *publicans* to be bap- "tised, and said unto him, Master, what shall "we do? And he said unto them, Exact no "more than that which is appointed you. "And the *soldiers* likewise demanded of him, "saying, And what shall we do? And he said "unto them, Do violence to no man, neither "accuse any falsely, and be content with your "wages."* Such repentance, and such fruits, so far as they prevailed, must produce the most happy effect upon the country, and tend to avert the curse. Those who believed, through the ministry of John, of Christ, or of the apostles, were as the salt of the land; and it might be for their sakes that its punishment was deferred till forty years after they had crucified the Lord of Glory. When God had gathered a people from amongst them, the remnant grew worse and worse, till in the end the curse overtook them. Previous to that "great and terrible day of the Lord," it was predicted that to all their other crimes they would add that of the most bitter persecution of Christ's servants. "The brother," said our Lord,

* Luke iii. 9——14.

" shall deliver up the brother to death, and the " father the child; and the children shall rise up " against their parents, and cause them to be put " to death."* Such was the fact. Having " killed the Lord Jesus, and their own prophets, " they persecuted his followers, and that with a " rage which not only displeased God, but ren- " dered them odious to men."† In short, we see that so far as the gospel was received, it tended to heal the country, and to retard the day of evil.

It is easy to perceive that the same causes, if applied to the world in general, would be productive of the same effects; or that THE GOSPEL IS THE ONLY EFFECTUAL MEAN OF HEALING THE DIVISIONS AMONG MANKIND, AND SO OF TURNING THE CURSE WHICH HANGS OVER US INTO A BLESSING.

That we may see the evidence and importance of this truth, it will be proper to take a view of the divisions which obtained amongst men, with their causes and tendency—of the inefficacy of all human means for removing them—and of the efficacy of the gospel for this great purpose.

* Matt. x. 21. † 1 Thes. ii. 15.

I. Let us take a view of THE DISSENSIONS WHICH OBTAINED AMONGST MEN, WITH THEIR CAUSES AND TENDENCY.

The state of the jewish people in the times of John was but an epitome of human nature as sunk into a gulph of depravity. From the fall of man to this day, the earth has been a scene of discord. Jealousies and antipathies rendered the first-born child of Adam a murderer; and prior to the flood "the earth was corrupt before God, "and filled with violence." Whether war was then reduced to a system, as it has been since, we are not told; but if not, it might be owing to the world not being yet divided into nations. The springs of domestic and social life were poisoned; the tender ties of blood and affinity violated; and quarrels, intrigues, oppressions, robberies and murderers, pervaded the abodes of man.

When that generation was swept away, and a new world arose from the family of Noah, it might have been expected that the examples which had been so recently exhibited would have had some effect; but in a little time the same things were acted over again. The story of Nimrod, though brief, affords a specimen of what has been going on in the world ever since. What

is the history of nations, but an account of a succession of *mighty hunters* and their adherents, each of whom in his day caused terror in the land of the living? The earth has been a kind of theatre, in which one part of mankind being trained and furnished with weapons, have been employed to destroy another, and this in a great measure for the gratification of the spectators!

Nor is this spirit of discord confined to nations. It pervades, in different degrees, every department of society, civil or religious. If the heavenly plant decay in any connection, or amongst any people, this weed will presently spring up in its place. No sooner did the church at Corinth become degenerate in their principles and conduct than there were "divisions amongst them." And when the Galatians had corrupted the doctrine of Christ, they required to be warned against "hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, "strife, &c.," and to be told, that "they who "do such things shall not enter the kingdom of "God."*

Whence is it that this evil spirit proceeds? Doomed as men are to innumerable evils during their short residence upon earth, and to death as the issue, one would think it might excite a sym-

* Gal. v. 20, 21.

pathy towards each other as fellow-sufferers, and a concern to mitigate rather than encrease the miseries of their situation. And when such things are viewed generally and abstractly, there are few men who would not admit as much as this, and wonder indeed that the world cannot live in peace. But when particular cases occur, and the general good is thought to clash with private interest, all these reasonings evaporate like smoke, and "the lusts which war in the members" bear down every thing before them.* The root of the evil lies in our having *forsaken God*, and become alienated from *Him*. It was the law of our creation, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy "God with all thy heart, and soul, and mind, "and strength, and thy neighbour as thyself;" and there is a closer connection between these different branches of the law than we are apt to suppose. If we love God, we shall love our brother also. For a man to *fear God* was sufficient to insure a just, kind, and humane treatment of his fellow men.† But if we cease to love *Him*, we shall not be able to love one another, unless it be for our own sake. It is the love of ourselves only that in this case governs us: and this is a principle which, not being subordinate to the love of God, is of the essence of sin, and tends in its own nature to fill the world with discord.

* James iv. 1. † Gen. xlii. 18.

Men form connections, some on a small, and some on a larger scale: but where self-love is the motive, every thing is expected to be done for their own honour, interest, or happiness; and the same thing being expected on the other side, there is no place for concord.

If two persons bear an affectionate good-will to each other as children of the same family, and each seek the good of the other from the pleasure of doing him good, and without so much as thinking that it is to issue in his own advantage, it *will* issue in his own advantage, and that to a far greater degree than if he had directly sought it. For God hath so constituted things that in seeking another's good we shall find our own. If parents and children, husbands and wives, feel only for themselves, they will resemble men in a famine, in which "no man spareth his brother: One snatches on the right hand, and is hungry; another eats on the left hand, and is not satisfied."* But if they feel for one another; if like the widow of Zarephath by Elijah, each one is willing to divide his morsel, that morsel becomes seven times more sweet, and God often blesses and encreases it till the return of plenty.

* Isai. ix. 19, 20.

These remarks are equally applicable to nations, as to individuals and families. It is owing to self-love having taking place of the love of God, that treaties of alliance and commerce are so frequently broken. While each party seeks nothing but its own interest, and requires that of the other to give place to it, it is impossible that concord should be of any continuance. If such leagues be not at once dissolved, it is merely in consideration of the one party hoping to gain, *notwithstanding* the selfishness of the other, or fearing that greater evils will arise from the breach than from the fulfilment of the treaty. But unions on so frigid a principle are unworthy of the name.

It is not difficult to perceive what must be the *tendency* of such a state of things. Nothing can better express it than the words of the Lord by the prophet, *Lest I come and smite the earth with a curse.* Where the love of God has no place, and self-love is the ruling principle in every department of society, every thing is ripening for destruction. If the whole earth were in this state, it would be as the barren fig-tree, and heaven would say, *Cut it down, why cumbereth it the ground!* It were better that there should be no world than such a world as this.

II. CONSIDER THE INEFFICACY OF ALL HUMAN MEANS FOR THE REMOVAL OF THESE EVILS.

The miseries produced in the earth by discord are so serious that it is become the necessary study of the thinking part of mankind to counteract them. Had the love of God ruled in the heart, this had been the cement of the world. If men had been ten thousand times more numerous than they are, this would have bound them all together: but this principle being extinct, others of a very inferior nature must be substituted in its place. It is partly by softening the asperities in human nature, and partly by cultivating its most pacific principles, that any thing is effected: but though these means may diminish the evil, yet they cannot produce any thing like a radical cure. Let us instance in a few particulars——

First, Great things have been done by *education*. By a course of discipline in early life, mankind are taught to avoid all rude and provoking language, and to carry it courteously and respectfully to all about them. Even harsh things, if expressed in soft and gentle terms, will in a good degree lose their harshness, and tend to dis-

arm the party of resentment. "A soft answer "turneth away wrath, while grievous words stir "up anger."* Herein consists the difference between barbarous and civilized society; a difference for which there is great cause for thankfulness. But after all, the change which is hereby effected is nearly confined to the surface of things: the real temper of the heart is much the same. The grand study in this science is appearance. The most bitter and malignant speeches are uttered without shame by those who reckon themselves gentlemen, and murder itself is patronized by the laws of honour. It were a difficult question to determine, which would be the least friendly to human happiness, for the whole world to be sunk into the lowest state of barbarism, or raised to these haughty and atheistical notions of honour. Assuredly this is not the way in which universal peace will be produced on earth.

Another principle to which great things also are ascribed, is, *a union of interests.* It is an undoubted fact that God in his providence has so interwoven the interests of mankind that they cannot subsist without each other. We talk proudly of independence; but we are all dependent, both upon God and one another. What

* Prov. xv. 1.

would any individual be, if left alone? What would a family be, if separated from all other families? What would cities be without the country, or the country without cities? Nay, what would nations be, if shut out from all intercourse with other nations? These considerations ought, no doubt, to induce mankind, of all ranks, degrees and situations, to study the things which make for peace: and to say that they actually have no influence in promoting concord, would be saying what is manifestly untrue. To this principle we are indebted for the stifling of thousands of quarrels, which would otherwise burst forth, and render society intolerable. To this also we are indebted for the suppression of a very large portion of religious hatred. Considering the enmity of wicked men against serious christians, instead of being surprised at its breaking out so much as it does, we have more reason to be surprised that it breaks out no more. Had not God so bound mankind together that they cannot obtain their own ends without being civil and kind to others, where there is one instance of bitter persecution we might expect a hundred; and the same may be said of every other species of malevolence.

But though such a constitution of things furnishes matter for thankfulness, yet it is utterly

inadequate to the producing of peace on earth, and good will to men. Stifled animosity is very different from love: the good understanding which arises from it is not peace, but the mere suspension of hostilities for the sake of convenience. It has been said, that the only thing necessary to produce universal peace is that mankind be enlightened to know their true interests. Certain it is, that if our true interests were known and pursued, we should seek the good of mankind in all that we have to do with them: but sin, operating in a way of selfishness, blinds the mind, and prompts men to seek their own interest in opposition to that of others. Such also is the strength of corrupt propensity in men, that in many cases which must appear to be injurious to themselves as well as others, they will frequently give way to it, whatever be the consequence, and even ruin themselves for the sake of ruining their neighbours. It is not therefore on this ground that we can rationally build our hope of any essential amelioration of the state of mankind.

Let us examine a Third principle; namely, *government*. This is doubtless an important blessing to mankind. It is amongst the means by which God in his providence preserves the world in some degree of order. The peace of the go-

verned, so far as it respects one another, is hereby in a measure secured. If a nation were for one week, or half that time without law, they would learn by woeful experience the value of living under it. The most oppressive governments are preferable to a state of anarchy. It may be on this account that even that of Nero afforded no exception to the general doctrine of government being ordained of God for good.*—But though order may be produced by human laws and regulations, yet it is chiefly confined to the exterior of human action. And with respect to that, it extends only to a single territory: between one country and another there is no paramount authority to settle their differences. What are termed the laws of nations have but little influence when one nation possesses the means of setting them at defiance. It is in vain to deny that the most effective law in the world is *power;* and as power is constantly varying, the world in one part or other is constantly in a state of warfare. Great conquerers call themselves "benefactors," and require to be called so even by the conquered; and what is worse, are admired and praised for their exploits in the page of history.

But the hopes which have been entertained of peace pervading the earth by means of govern-

* Rom. xiii.

ment have arisen not from the thing itself, but from *certain forms* of it. There is, no doubt, a difference as to these. That form of government, be it what it may, which contributes most to the administration of substantial justice in a country, and cuts off the motives of war in respect of other countries, is the best: but while men are corrupt, selfish, and ambitious, and possess the means of extending their power, they will never be in want of a plea for disturbing the repose of mankind. To expect them under such circumstances to be restrained by forms of their own creating, is expecting too much, and indicates but a slender acquaintance with human nature. A form that should leave no scope for the propensities of a people would be borne away before them in a little time. To banish wars from the earth therefore, it is necessary to banish selfishness, ambition, and other corrupt affections which produce them. Even allowing a nation and its government to be, upon the whole, justly and peaceably disposed; yet as there will always be cases occurring in which its interests will clash with those of other nations, and in which amicable discussion, through the partiality which each side feels for its own cause, fails to produce mutual satisfaction, the consequence will often be a recourse to arms. The

principles on which wars are undertaken are in many instances the same as those by which two individuals are prompted to fight a duel. They *may* have no desire to fight, nor to kill each other: but *the laws of honour* require them to act as they do! So long therefore as these laws, to the exclusion of the laws of God, continue to rule the higher orders of mankind, it is impossible but that wars and fightings will come.

But if education, interest, and government fail to produce the desired effect, yet is there no other principle whose influence shall extend more to the heart, by which it may be accomplished? If there be, it must be *kindred*, or *relationship*. This, I acknowledge, has done great things. By the tender and endearing ties of blood and affinity the asperities of human nature are greatly softened, and God has in a manner bound us together. From hence perhaps arises the practicability of mankind dwelling together in families. By alliances of this sort a good understanding is frequently kept up in neighbourhoods, and sometimes between great nations. Natural affection, though in itself it be mere animal attachment, and has nothing morally good in it, yet to be without it argues the perfection of depravity. Nothing short of an habitually wicked heart can extin-

guish it. If this principle be overcome, there seems to be nothing left in human nature that can withstand the tide of corruption. It is therefore with peculiar force and propriety that God, by the prophet, represents the depravity of the jewish nation as having set "the hearts of the "fathers against their children, and the hearts "of the children against their fathers;" and having reached this height, as being incurable by any thing short of a divine interposition.

Strong as the ties of blood and affinity are, yet there are two reasons why universal peace can never be expected to proceed from them. One is, their influence extends only to a small part of mankind. It is true, we are all akin as creatures, and as having sprung from one common ancestor; but this is a consideration that has but little weight amongst the bulk of mankind. It is only towards *near* relations that the attachment in question is felt. The other is, that even with respect to that part of mankind who are nearly related to each other, there is in general no such attachment as to over-balance the selfish affections.

The sum is, there is not a principle in human nature from which any rational expectation can

be formed of the world ever becoming materially different from what it is. It may be more enlightened; but this will present no sufficient barrier against the tide of corrupt passions which bear along its stream the educated no less than the uneducated part of mankind. Man may shift and change into a thousand forms, and may promise himself peace in each of them; but he will not find it. He may attribute his misery to circumstances, and flatter himself that if *they* were different, all would be well: but the cause is in himself, and is therefore sure to accompany him in every situation and condition. He may "change the place, but will keep the pain." If there were no hope from a higher quarter, the world would be shut up under sin, and have nothing to expect but to be smitten with the curse.

III. CONSIDER THE EFFICACY OF THE GOSPEL FOR THE DIFFUSION OF UNIVERSAL PEACE.

That which was wrought among the jews by the preaching of John, furnished a specimen of what should be wrought in the world at large by the same means. They who had been disobedient were turned to the wisdom of the just. Repenting of their sins, they believed in the Mes-

siah as at hand; and being thus reconciled to God, they became reconciled to one another; loving and being loved, forgiving and being forgiven.

In ascribing these effects to the gospel, we only ascribe to it that which in its own nature it is evidently adapted to produce; that which it actually has produced so far as it has been cordially received; and that which the tenor of scripture prophecy gives us to expect.

First, *The gospel is in its own nature evidently adapted to produce peace on earth, and good will to men.* It may indeed be the *occasion* of contention and bitterness in unbelievers; but this is not its proper effect: it is accidental to it, and reflects no more dishonour upon it than the good works of its Author, which occasioned his being stoned by the jews, reflected upon him.

We have seen already that the root of all the discord in the world is found in mankind having *forsaken God:* that therefore which is the means of bringing them back to God, and that only, will restore concord. It is thus that the root of bitterness is plucked up, and love, the plant of paradise, substituted in its place. We

have seen that "wars and fightings proceed from the *lusts* which war in our members:" that therefore which teaches us to mortify these lusts, removes the causes, and by so doing removes the effects. Pride, self-will, and the love of money are the great sources of those calamities which in all ages have deluged the world with misery: but if we believe the gospel, they will be in a good measure dried up, and then the current which has been fed by them must cease to flow. "The work of righteousness shall be peace, and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance for ever."*

The gospel is a system *in direct opposition to selfishness.* It not only enforces a benevolent disposition, but is fraught with principles adapted to promote it. It furnishes the mind with a new set of views and feelings, both towards God, and towards man. It tells us of One, who, when all other means failed, said, "Lo I come to do thy will, O my God; yea, thy law is within my heart;" of One who laid down his life for us, even when we were yet enemies. Now to imbibe this doctrine is to become in a measure of the same mind. He that is born of God possesses

* Isai. xxxii. 17.

the spirit of a little child. Old things are passed away, and all things become new. "Laying "aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocricies, "and envies, and all evil speakings, as a new-"born babe he desireth the sincere milk of the "word that he may grow thereby."

The gospel also furnishes us with a *centre*, or *bond of union*. Without this, men are like grains of sand, without any principle of adhesion, and must therefore of necessity be divided and scattered. The physical strength of a nation is but of small account in a time of danger, if they have no standard to repair to, and no leader and commander in whom they can place confidence. But a wise and patriotic prince will hold a people together, and induce them to love their country and one another the better for his sake. Such is our Redeemer, and such the love of one another which love to him inspires. Yea more, it teaches us to love all mankind, from a hope that they may become his friends.

Now if such sentiments and feelings were universal, or if only the greater part of mankind possessed them, the world, from being a wilderness, would become a paradise. "Instead of

" the thorn, would come up the fir-tree; and " instend of the briar, the myrtle-tree: and it " would be to the Lord for a name, for an " everlasting sign that should not be cut off."

Secondly, *The gospel, so far as it has been cordially received, has actually produced these effects.* I say *cordially* received, for it has met with a kind of reception which is not cordial, and which, if it may be called believing, the term must be understood in a very restricted and partial sense. We have been asked by unbelievers, How is it, if christianity be that pacific system which it professes to be, that christian nations do not live in peace? We answer, —— (1.) Because a very large proportion of the people who inhabit those nations are christians only in name. When any question arises between serious christians and avowed unbelievers, persons of this description commonly prove themselves to be one in heart with the latter, and ought therefore to be classed with them. —— (2.) Because those who believe the doctrine which they profess, and are real christians, yet do not always act consistently with their profession. These things certainly furnish occasion for the unbelieving part of the world, who seek occasion, to stumble at the gospel: hence a woe is pronounced on the world be-

cause of offences, or stumbling blocks, and a still heavier one on those by whom the offence cometh. Yet notwithstanding these deductions, christianity has wrought enough to establish its pacific character. We could tell of myriads who, from being persecutors and injurious, like Saul of Tarsus, no sooner embraced the gospel than they became other men; seeking the good of all around them, even of their worst enemies. We could appeal to the pacific spirit and conduct of thousands in our own times, who, influenced by the same principles, seek by every mean in their power to heal the divisions, and alleviate the miseries of mankind.

If the christians scattered over bleeding Europe could have healed her, she would have been healed before now. They may, as well as other men, have been engaged in the wars; and when called for in defence of their country, it may have been their duty so to do: but they have surely hailed the return of peace, and that not for their own sakes only, but from good will to men.

Why should unbelievers load christianity with the persecutions, intrigues, and unjust wars which have been carried on in christendom;

when, if they were disposed to judge righteously, they must allow not only that the same things existed, and were accompanied with much more ferocity under the heathen governments, but that what has existed since is not to be ascribed to christianity, but to the want of it? It was not till the gospel was corrupted, and in a manner lost, among those who called themselves *the church*, that such things occurred. Instead of their proving any thing therefore against the pure and peaceful nature of genuine christianity, they furnish an argument in its favour. The immoralities in the churches at Corinth and in Galatia, when they had corrupted the gospel, was a proof of its moral rather than of its immoral tendency. Is it to Christ, or to Antichrist, that the blood which has been shed for the last twelve hundred years, on account of religion, ought to be imputed? Have the atrocities committed by Europeans on the shores of Africa, and in other parts of the world, been owing to christianity, or to the want of it? Let truth and conscience give the answer.

Thirdly, *The tenor of scripture prophecy gives us to expect far greater effects than those which have yet been produced.* The world, like an abandoned sinner, may go on till it is "wearied in "the greatness of its way:" but if we believe

in God and his prophets, we must conclude that it will not be so always. It was one great end of Christ's coming into the world to "set judgment "in the earth;" and though he have to encounter great opposition, "yet shall he not fail nor be "discouraged" till it be accomplished. The present disorders of the world will assuredly issue in a peaceful and happy state of things. Of this the following, among many other passages, it is presumed, afford ample proof:——

"And there shall come forth a rod out of the "stem of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of "his roots.... and righteousness shall be the "girdle of his loins, and faithfulness the girdle "of his reins. The wolf also shall dwell with "the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with "the kid: and the calf, and the young lion, "and the fatling together; and a little child "shall lead them. And the cow and the bear "shall feed; their young ones shall lie down to-"gether; and the lion shall eat straw like the "ox. And the sucking child shall play upon "the hole of the asp, and the weaned child "shall put his hand on the cockatrice den. "They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my "holy mountain: for *the earth shall be full of* "*the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters coven*

" *the sea.* And in that day there shall be a root " of Jesse which shall stand for an ensign of the " people: to it shall the gentiles seek, and his " rest shall be glorious——The jealously also of " Ephraim shall depart, and the enmity of Judah " shall be no more: Ephraim shall not envy Ju- " dah, and Judah shall not vex Ephraim*—— " The greaves of the armed warrier in conflict, " and the garment rolled in much blood, shall " be for a burning, even fuel for the fire.† For " unto us a child is born; unto us a Son is giv- " en; the government shall be upon his shoul- " der; and his name shall be called.... *the* " *Prince of peace.* Of the increase of his govern- " ment and peace there shall be no end; upon " the throne of David, and upon his kingdom; " to order it, and to establish it with judgement " and with justice, from henceforth even for " ever: the zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform " this‡—In his days shall the righteous flou- " ish, and abundance of peace so long as the " moon endureth.§—God be merciful unto us, " and bless us, and cause his face to shine upon " us; that thy way may be known upon earth, " thy saving health among all nations. Let the " people praise thee, O God, let all the people " praise thee. O let the nations be glad 'and

* Isai. xi. † Lowth. ‡ Isai. ix. 5—7 § Psal. lxxii. 7.

" sing for joy: for thou shalt judge the people
" righteously, and govern the nations upon
" earth*——And it shall come to pass in the
" last days that the mountain of the Lord's
" house shall be established in the top of the
" mountains, and shall be exalted above the
" hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And
" many peoples shall go and say, Come ye, and
" let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to
" the house of the God of Jacob; and he will
" teach us of his ways, and we shall walk in his
" paths; for out of Zion shall go forth the law,
" and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.
" And he shall judge among the nations, and
" shall rebuke many peoples; and they shall
" beat their swords into plough-shares, and their
" spears into pruning-hooks; nation shall not
" lift up sword against nation, neither shall they
" learn war any more†——As the rain cometh
" and the snow from heaven, and returneth not
" thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh
" it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed
" to the sower, and bread to the eater; so shall
" my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth;
" it shall not return unto me void, but it shall
" accomplish that which I please, and it shall
" prosper in the thing whereto I sent it. For ye

* Psal. lxvii. † Isai. ii. 2—4.

" shall go out with joy, and shall be led forth
" with peace: the mountains and the hills shall
" break forth before you into singing, and all
" the trees of the field shall clap their hands.
" Instead of the thorn shall come up the fir-tree,
" and instead of the briar shall come up the
" myrtle-tree; and it shall be to the Lord for
" a name, for an everlasting sign that shall not
" be cut off."*

There are some, who by refining on the spirituality of Christ's kingdom, have concluded that things will always continue much the same as they are now; and that to understand these prophecies as denoting a general spread of the gospel over the various nations of the earth, would be holding with national establishments of religion, and symbolizing with the jews in their expectations of a worldly kingdom! If these persons be capable of deriving happiness from such opinions, we need not envy them; nor can we be surprised at their feeling no more interest in the conversion of sinners, and taking no more pains to accomplish it than they have hitherto done. If there be any symbolizing with the carnal jews on either side, it would seem to consist in that selfish spirit which would confine the gos-

* Isai. lv. 10—13.

pel to those who already possess it, *forbidding us*, in a manner, *to speak unto the gentiles, that they may be saved.* I have no wish to decide how far the mind of a christian may be perverted by the infatuating influence of hypothesis, nor how far he may be suffered to pervert the word of God in supporting it; but of this I am satisfied, that such notions are in their very essence antichristian.

Taking the foregoing passages in their simple and obvious meaning, they manifestly predict things which have hitherto had no accomplishment, or at most only a partial one. The earth has not yet been *full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.* God's *saving health* has not yet been so *known among all nations* as for all the people to form a kind of chorus in his praise. It is not as yet that Christ, as the head of a spiritual kingdom, *judges and governs the nations upon earth.* The time is not yet arrived for *swords to be beaten into plough-shares, and spears into pruning-hooks. Ths garment rolled in blood has not yet become a burning, even fuel for the fire.* Christ's reign seems not as yet to have assumed the character of a *glorious rest:* hitherto it has borne a greater resemblance to that of David, who was engaged in continual wars, than to that

of Solomon, to whom the Lord gave rest on every side, and who was therefore employed in building a temple for his name. It is said of the promises made to Abraham and his posterity, that "the Lord gave unto Israel all the land which "he sware to give unto their fathers; and they "possessed it, and dwelt therein: and that the "Lord gave them rest round about, according to "all that he sware unto their fathers—there failed "not ought of any good thing which the Lord "had spoken unto the house of Israel: all came "to pass." * But if things continue much the same as they now are to the end of time, I do not perceive how this language could apply to the promises made to Christ and the church. In this case the prophets must have dealt largely in hyperbole, and their words when reduced to meaning, amount to little in comparison of what they would seem to convey.

It is farther observable from the foregoing prophecies, that whatever evils may precede the triumph of the gospel, yet that the thing itself will take place without bloodshed, treachery, intrigue, tumult, or parade. The overturning of those governments which set themselves against the preaching of it may be necessary to prepare

* Josh. xxi. 43—45.

the way; and this may be accomplished by wicked men, and wicked means: but this will be only as the wind; the earthquake, and the fire, to the still small voice. The noise of hammers and axes, though necessary in preparing for the temple, was not to be heard in the building of it. The kingdoms of this world are commonly founded either in violence, or in deceit, and often in both; but that of *the Prince of peace* will correspond with his character. Justice and judgment will be the basis of his throne. He himself hath "done no *violence*, neither was there any *deceit* in his mouth;" and however he may turn such measures in his enemies to the advantage of his cause, he will never allow his servants to have recourse to them.—The *peace* produced by other conquerors is merely the effect of fear. It is the stillness of the oppressed, who dare not complain, lest their oppression should be encreased: but the peace promised under the reign of Christ is ascribed to the earth being "filled "with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters "cover the sea." His conquests are those of the heart. His subjects will be such from conviction and choice.

The kingdoms of this world are introduced and supported by parade: but it will not be so

with the kingdom of Christ. This, as he told the pharisees, came "not by observation," or outward shew: neither should they say, "Lo here, and lo there; for it was already among them."* And thus we may conclude it will come when it shall fill the whole earth. Men shall not be able to point to this place or that, and say, Lo it is here, or lo it is there: for ere they are aware it shall be among them. Worldly men may at the time be pursuing their schemes with such earnestness as to think no more of it than Festus did "of one Jesus, who was dead, and whom Paul affirmed to be alive:" but while they are pursuing their schemes, God will have so pursued his, as that they shall find themselves surrounded by it in every direction, and as unable to stop its progress as the jewish rulers were when they complained of the apostles for having "filled Jerusalem with their doctrine." In this silent and imperceptible way the gospel continued to operate in the early ages, when it was left to its own evidence, and the power of the holy Spirit, to recommend it. In the days of Tertullian, that is, in less than two hundred years after the death of Christ, that apologist could tell the Roman senate, that it had "over-

* Luke xvii. 20, 21.

" spread their empire. Your cities, islands, " forts, towns, and assemblies; your very camps, " wards, companies, palace, senate, forum, all " (said he) swarm with christians." Yet all appears to have been conducted without violence or tumult, save that which was found amongst unbelievers.

We read of the stone cut out of the mountain breaking in pieces the great monarchies of the earth; of the kingdoms of this world becoming the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ; of his judging the people righteously, and governing the nations upon earth; and of the kingdom under the whole heaven being given to the people of the saints of the Most High.* But it does not follow that governments will be destroyed *as governments*, but merely as *idolatrous* or *anti-christian governments*. We have no reason to think that Christ will abolish civil authorities, and set up a government of his own in their stead. His kingdom never was, and never will be of this world. If the government of nations, as well as that of lesser societies, be CONDUCTED ON CHRISTIAN PRINCIPLES, then will Christ reign; then will the kingdoms of the world become the kingdoms of the Lord and of his

* Dan. ii. 45. Rev. xi. 15. Psal. lxvii. 4. Dan. vii. 27.

Christ, and then may the nations be glad and sing for joy. These principles existing in the hearts of governors and governed, would shortly burst the bands of oppression, still the tumults of the people, and cause wars to cease unto the ends of the earth. The dæmon of discord might then be addressed in the language of the psalmist: "O thou enemy! Destructions are come to a perpetual end: thou hast destroyed cities; their memorial is perished with them—But the Lord shall endure for ever; he hath prepared his throne for judgment."*

And now, things being reduced to this peaceful state, instead of the earth being *smitten with a curse*, we are given to expect that it will be loaded with blessings. "Then shall the earth "yield her encrease, and God, even our own "God shall bless us, and all the ends of the "earth shall fear him."† Nor do I see any objection to the "encrease" here predicted being literally understood. It is a fact, that from the day that man departed from God the earth was cursed with barrenness, in comparison of what it was before; and it is not unnatural to suppose that when the greater part of men shall have returned to him, this curse may be in a manner re-

* Psal. ix. 6, 7. † Psal. lxvii. 6. 7.

moved. At present, the system of depravity which prevails among men renders it *unnecessary*. Sin counteracts the tendency to "encrease and "multiply," with which we were created. The world is in a manner depopulated by selfishness, intemperance, and war; and a great part of it inhabited by wild beasts, and other noxious creatures. But when men shall know the Lord, and these wide-wasting evils shall subside, population will encrease; and he that sends men will amply provide for them. "In that day will I make a "covenant for them with the beasts of the field, "and with the fowls of heaven and with the creep- "ing things of the ground; and I will break the "bow, and the sword, and the battle, out of the "earth, and will make them to lie down safely. "And I will betroth thee unto me for ever; yea, "I will betroth thee unto me in righteousness, and "in judgment and in loving-kindness, and in mer- "cies: I will even betroth thee unto me in faith- "fulness, and thou shalt know the Lord. And it "shall come to pass in that day, I will hear, saith "the Lord, I will hear the heavens, and they shall "hear the earth; and the earth shall hear the corn, "and the wine, and the oil; and they shall hear "Jezreel."*

* Hos. ii. 18—22. Comp. with i. 11.

Moreover, at present the system of depravity which prevails among men would render any considerable encrease of earthly fulness exceedingly *dangerous*. There appears to be as much wisdom and goodness as there is of justice in the sentence passed on man, to "eat bread by the "sweat of their faces." Were there no necessity for hard labour, every day might be taken up in riot and debauchery. The deeds of the Sodomites and of the Canaanites might be reacted. The bacchanalian revels which are seen at some of our contested elections (where men can indulge free of expense) afford a specimen of what might be expected, if God, while men are what they are, were to cause the earth to yield her encrease. It would be nothing less than furnishing them with the means of being seven times more wicked. But when men shall know the Lord, the danger will have subsided; and then he will take pleasure in pouring forth his blessings upon them; and then, instead of those blessings being abused as heretofore, they shall tend to recommend the gospel. "God, even our own God, "shall bless us. God shall bless us, and all the "ends of the earth shall fear him."

Once more, As peace among men will be followed with a blessing on the earth, so peace

among christians will be followed with a blessing on the means of grace. The depravity which has hitherto prevailed in the world has in too great a measure extended to the church, and wrought much in a way of destroying its fruitfulness. Corruptions have produced divisions, envies, jealousies, and almost every evil work. Hence the blessing of God has been in a great measure withheld. We read of great things among the apostles and primitive christians, and now and then hear of a minister and a people, who, approaching somewhat near to their doctrine and spirit, are honoured with a portion of their success: but in general we are as "when they have "gathered the summer fruits, as the grape gleanings of the vintage: there is no cluster to eat, "though our souls desire the first ripe fruit."* Now as the carnal notions, envies, and petty discords of the apostles ceased from the time of their Lord's resurrection, and as the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul, so will it be with the whole church of Christ when the Spirit shall be poured out from on high. And then, "the earth shall yield her encrease" in a still higher sense. Not only every nation and city, but every town, if not every village, will furnish a church of Christ, walking in the fear of

* Mic. vii. 1.

the Lord and in the comfort of the holy Spirit. Then will God, even their own God, bless them, and all the ends of the earth shall fear him. The people of God will "be of good comfort, " will be of one mind, will live in peace, and " the God of love and peace shall be with " them!"

From the whole we may conclude——

1. It becomes christians to set their hearts much on the spread of the gospel: to pray for it, labour for it, contribute of their substance for it, and to rest all their hopes of the amelioration of the state of mankind upon it. Political men may place their hopes on political changes; but christians should always remember that "peace " on earth, and good will to men" connect with " glory to God in the highest," and that they are reserved to grace the triumphs of the Prince of peace.

2. It is of infinite importance for us to repent and believe the gospel. So long as any of us are unbelievers, we are under the curse, and the whole career of our life tends to draw down the curse of heaven upon us, and upon the earth on which we dwell. We have heard much of the conver-

sion of the jews and heathens; but of what account will either be to us, if we be not ourselves converted? All the great and good things which the Lord has promised, either in this world or that which is to come, will, if we be unbelievers, only aggravate our misery.

3. Sinners, even the greatest of sinners, have every encouragement to repent and believe in Jesus. The invitation of Moses to Hobab is the same for substance as Christ's servants are now warranted to address to every one they meet: "We are journeying to the place of which the "Lord said, I will give it you: come thou with "us, and we will do thee good; for the Lord "hath spoken good concerning Israel."

THE RECEPTION OF CHRIST THE TURNING POINT OF SALVATION.

SERMON VI.

JOHN i. 10—12.

He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name.

AMONG the numerous self-deceiving notions which are cherished in the minds of men, is that of their being willing at any time to return to God, provided they had opportunity, and the means of doing so. In accounting for their own impenitence and perseverance in sin, they will impute it to their situation, their temptations, their callings, their connections, or to any thing but their evil hearts. Some have even

learned to speak evil of their hearts, while it is manifest that they mean to include under that term nothing pertaining to intention, desire, or design, but something that exists and operates in them against their inclination. Hence you will often hear them acknowledge themselves to be unconverted, and at the same time express how willing and desirous they are of being converted, if it would but please God to put forth his power in their favour. The word of God however, speaks a different language: while it ascribes all that is good to grace only, it lays the evil at the sinner's own door.

A great number of instances might be alleged from the scriptures in proof of this truth, but the greatest proof of all is the manner in which Christ himself was treated when he appeared upon earth. The evangelist having introduced him to his reader in all the glory of divinity, describes in plaintive language the neglect and contempt he met with, both from the world in general and from his own nation in particular. Let us examine these complaints.

He was in the world——It has often been objected that if the religion of Christ has a claim on the world, why has not the world had more of an

opportunity to hear it? It might be the design of the evangelist to obviate this objection. His being in the world does not not seem to refer so much to his personal presence among men in the days of his flesh as to those manifestations of him which from the beginning of the world had furnished them with the means of knowing him, and which therefore rendered their ignorance inexcusable. He had been revealed at the outset of the world as the Woman's Seed, who should bruise the head of the Serpent. Sacrifices were appointed to prefigure his atonement, and which, though perverted, were never discontinued, even amongst the heathen. The selection of the seed of Abraham, and their miraculous settlement in Canaan, must have attracted universal attention; and as the Messiah was a prominent feature of their religion, he was in a manner proclaimed through every nation. The effect produced on the mariners when Jonah told them that he was "a Hebrew, and feared JEHOVAH, the God of "heaven, who made the sea and the dry land, shews very plainly that the displays of omnipotence in behalf of Israel were not unknown to the surrounding nations. That also which was soon after produced on the Ninevites, when they learned that he was a Hebrew prophet, sent of God, evinces the same thing. And if they were

not ignorant of God's judgments, they were not destitute of the means of enquiring after the true religion. Nay more, the expectation of the promised Messiah was for a long time before he appeared very general among the nations. Had they therefore possessed any portion of a right spirit, or any desire after the true God, they would have been as inquisitive as were the wise men of the east, and as desirous as they were of paying him homage.

Not only was he in the world so as to render their ignorance of him inexcusable, but *the world itself was made by him.* Though as to the state of their minds they were far from him, yet he was not far from every one of them; for in him they lived and moved, and had their being. When he became incarnate, it was nothing less than their Creator in very deed dwelling with them upon the earth. Such an event ought to have excited universal enquiry, and to have induced all men every where to repent.

But though he was in the world, and the world was made by him, yet *the world knew him not!* Full of their own schemes and pursuits, they think nothing of him. The Roman governors in hearing the accusations of the jews against

Paul, and his defences, had great opportunities of knowing the truth; but the ignorance and contempt expressed by Festus in his report of the matter to Agrippa, shews the inefficacy of all means unless accompanied with the mighty power of God. The jews " brought none accusation " of such things as he supposed, but had certain " questions against him of their own superstition, and of one Jesus who was dead, whom " Paul affirmed to be alive! " *

But this is not the heaviest complaint——*He came unto his own, and his own received him not.* How appropriate are the terms here used! He *was* in the world, and therefore within the reach of enquiry. But to the seed of Abraham he *came*, knocking as it were at their door for admission; but *they received him not.* The world are accused of ignorance; but they of unbelief: for, receiving him not, though a merely negative form of speech, yet is expressive of a positive refusal of him. Instead of welcoming the heavenly visitant, they drove him from their door, and even banished him from the earth. Who would have supposed that a people whose believing ancestors had been earnestly expecting

* Acts xxv. 19.

the Messiah for a succession of ages, would have rejected him when he came amongst them? Yet so it was: and if jews or deists of the present day ask, How could these things be; we answer, it was foretold by their own prophets that He should possess "neither form nor comliness in "their eyes, and that when they should see him "there would be no beauty that they should de-"sire him."

The consideration of their being *his own* people, the children of Abraham his friend, added to their sin, and to his affliction. It was this he so pathetically lamented when he "beheld the "city and wept over it, saying, If thou hadst "known, even thou, at least in this thy day, "the things which belong unto thy peace! But "now they are hid from thine eyes."*

Grievous however as this treatment was to our blessed Lord, he was not utterly disregarded. Though the world in general knew him not, and though the great body of his own nation rejected him, yet there was a remnant according to the election of grace, partly jews and partly gentiles, who received him: and whether they had been previously distinguished by their

* Luke xix. 41, 42.

sobriety, or by their profligacy; whether they came in companies, as under Peter's sermon, or as individuals, like her who wept and washed his feet, or him who sought mercy when expiring by his side on the cross,—all were received by him, and raised to the highest dignity. *To as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name.* And thus, though Israel was not gathered, yet Christ was glorious in the eyes of the Lord, and had a people given him from among the heathen.

I need not say that the treatment which our Saviour received is the same for substance in all ages. There is a world that still knows him not, and many who, though possessed of the means of grace, yet receive him not: and, blessed be God, there are also many out of both who still receive him, and are still blessed with the privilege of being adopted into his heavenly family.

That we may understand and feel the importance of the subject, I shall first enquire, what is supposed and included in receiving Christ—— Secondly, consider the great privilege annexed to it——and lastly, observe the wisdom of God

in rendering the reception of Christ the great turning point of salvation.

I. *Let us enquire, what is supposed and included in* RECEIVING CHRIST.

The phrase is supposed to be ecquivalent with "believing on his name." To receive Christ is to believe in him, and to believe in Christ is to receive him. There are some slight shades of difference between these and some other terms which are used to express faith in Christ; such as *believing*, *trusting*, *receiving*, *&c.*; but they must be the same in substance, or they would not be used in the new testament as convertible terms. Believing seems to respect Christ as exhibited in the gospel testimony; trusting, as revealed with promise; and receiving supposes him to be God's free gift, presented to us for acceptance in the invitations of the gospel: but, as I said, all come to the same issue. He that believeth the testimony trusteth the promise, and receiveth the gift; and the whole is necessary to an interest in his benefits, whether pardon, justification, adoption, or any other spiritual blessing.

If we were enquiring into the nature of believing, it might be necessary to examine the

testimony; if of trusting, we must ascertain wherein consists the promise; and so if we would form just conceptions of receiving Christ, we must observe what is said of the gift of him: for each is the standard of the other, and will be found to correspond with it. "*So* we preached, and *so* ye believed."

Considering Christ then as the gift of God, it is necessary to observe that he is the *first* and *chief* of all his gifts, and that for his sake all others are bestowed. "He that spared not his "own Son, but freely delivered him up for us "all, how shall he not *with him*, freely give us "all things?"* Other gifts may be so great that nothing in this world can be compared with them; but this is the greatest. It is great for God to forbear with us, greater to forgive us, and greater still to accept and crown us with eternal life; but all this is supposed to be small in comparison of the gift of his own Son; and therefore it is argued, that having bestowed the greater, we may trust him for the rest.——But if God first gives Christ, and with him all things freely, we must first receive Christ, and with him all things freely. The first exercise of

* Rom. viii. 32.

faith therefore does not consist in receiving the benefits resulting from his death, or in a persuasion of our sins being forgiven, but in receiving Christ; and having received him, we *with him* receive an interest in those benefits. Hence the propriety of such language as this: "He that "*hath* the Son hath life, and he that *hath not* "the Son of God hath not life."*

It is on this principle that union with Christ is represented as the foundation of an interest in his benefits, as it is in the following passages. "Of him are ye *in* Christ Jesus, who of God is "made unto us *wisdom*, and *righteousness*, and "*sanctification*, and *redemption*—There is there-"fore now *no condemnation* to them that are *in* "Christ Jesus—That I may be found *in* him, "not having mine own righteousness which is "of the law, but that which is through the faith "of Christ, the righteousness which is of God "by faith."† It is thus in the marriage union, to which that of believers with Christ is compared. As she that is joined to a husband becomes interested in all that he possesses, so they that are joined to Christ are by the gracious constitution of the gospel interested in all that he

* 1 John vi. 12. † 1 Cor. i. 30. Rom. viii. 1. Phil. iii. 9.

possesses. He is heir of all things, and they are joint-heirs with him. The sum is, that receiving Christ is the great turning point of salvation, or that by which we obtain a revealed interest in all the blessings of the gospel.

But more particularly, to receive Christ presupposes a sense of sin, and of our exposedness to the just displeasure of God. It is a great error to hold up a sense of sin as a qualification which gives us a warrant to receive the Saviour, and so to consider the invitations of the gospel as addressed to sensible sinners only, as this must necessarily teach men to reckon themselves the favourites of God while yet they are in a state of unbelief. But it is no less an error to suppose that any sinner will receive the Saviour without perceiving and feeling his need of him. It is one thing to require a sense of sin as a qualification that gives a warrant to receive the Saviour, and another to plead for it as necessary in the nature of things to a compliance with that warrant. What is the reason that Christ is rejected, and the gospel made light of by the great body of mankind? Is it not, as the scriptures represent it, because they are whole in their own eyes, and therefore think they need no physician? While men are righteous in their own esteem, the gos-

pel must appear to be a strange doctrine, and the dwelling so much upon Christ in the ministry of the word a strange conduct. How is it that the doctrine of salvation by grace, through the atonement of the Son of God, should be so generally opposed even by nominal christians? The reason is the same. Sin is considered as a light thing, a mere frailty or imperfection, unfortunately attached to human nature; and while this is the case there appears to be no need of a Mediator, at least not of one that is divine, and who to atone for sin should be required to assume humanity, and render his life a sacrifice. Hence it is necessary to be convinced of sin in order to receive the Saviour.

Much of this conviction may respect only our guilt and danger, and so have nothing spiritually good in it: but in those who in the end receive the Saviour, it is wholly so. There is such a thing as *spiritual conviction*, or conviction which involves in it an abhorrence of sin, and of ourselves on account of it. Such is that sense of its intrinsically evil nature, or as the scriptures speak, of its *exceeding sinfulness*, which is produced by a just view of the spirituality and equity of the divine law.* And such is that re-

* Rom. vii. 13.

pentance towards God which is represented as necessary to faith in Christ, and as included in it.* We may be convinced of our guilt and danger by an enlightened conscience only, and may be very sorry for our sin in reference to its consequences: but this, though it may be used to prepare the way of the Lord, yet will neither divest the sinner of his self-righteous spirit, nor render him willing to come to Christ that he may have life; and instead of issuing in his receiving him, may end in his destruction.—A sense of the exceeding sinfulness of sin, on the other hand, tends in its own nature to kill a self-righteous spirit, and to induce the sinner to embrace the gospel † It is impossible to have a just sense of the evil of sin, and at the same time to object to the way of salvation by grace through a Mediator.

Again, to receive Christ replies the renunciation of every thing which stands in opposition to him, or comes in competition with him. Viewing Christ as a guest, he stands at the door and knocks; and why is it kept barred against him? Because the sinner has a variety of other guests already in his house, and is aware that if he enter,

* Matt. xxi. 32. 2 Tim. ii. 25. † Rom. vii. 9—11. Gal. ii. 19.

they must be dismissed ; and being reluctant to part with them, he cannot find in his heart, at least for the present, to welcome the heavenly visitant. These guests are not only darling sins, but corrupt principles, flesh-pleasing schemes, and a spirit of self-righteous pride. With these Christ cannot associate. If we receive him, we must reject them, and that not as being forced to it for the sake of escaping the wrath of God, but with all our hearts. Many, considering the necessity of the thing, would willingly receive Christ, so that they might retain what is most dear to them ; but this being inadmissible, they, like him who was nearest of kin to Ruth, decline it, lest they should mar their own inheritance.

It was not so with Moses. He had to *refuse* as well as *chuse ;** and for the sake of Christ, yea for the *reproach* of Christ, he did refuse even the prospect of a crown. Paul had great advantages by birth, and had acquired many more by application ; but when they came in competition with Christ, all this gain was counted loss. Nor did he ever repent the sacrifice, but towards the close of life declared, saying, " Yea doubless, " and I count all things but loss for the excel-

* Heb. xi. 24, 25.

" lency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my " Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all " things, and do count them but dung that I " may win Christ, and be found in him."

Moreover, to receive Christ is expressive of the exercise not of one faculty only, but of *all the powers of the soul.* If it were merely an exercise of the understanding, as distinguished from the will and affections, it would not be properly opposed to a *rejection* of him, which is manifestly the idea by the term "received him not." As unbelief includes more than an error in judgment, even an aversion of the heart to Christ, and the way of salvation by his death; so faith includes more than an accurate notion of things, even a cordial acceptance of him, and the way of salvation by him. Nothing short of this can with any propriety be considered as *receiving* him, or as having the promise of eternal life.

Finally, to receive Christ requires to be not only by all in us, but to have respect to *all in him.* If we receive Christ as the gift of God, we must receive him for all the purposes for which he is given. These purposes may be distinguished, and one may come in order after another, but they must not be separated. Were it possible to

receive him as an atoning sacrifice without yielding ourselves up to his authority, or to yield ourselves up to his authority without relying on his sacrifice, each would be vain; and could both of them be united without sitting at his feet as little children to be instructed in his will, it were still in vain. The invitation of our Lord in the eleventh of Matthew shews both the order and connection of these things. "Come unto me, all ye "that labour and are heavy laden, and I will "give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and "learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in "heart, and ye shall find rest unto your souls: "for my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." The first concern of a sinner is to *come* to Christ as the *Saviour* of the lost: but at what time he doth this, he must also take his yoke upon him as his *Lord* and *Lawgiver*. Nor is this all: he must take him for his *example*, learning his spirit, and following his steps.

II. CONSIDER THE PRIVILEGE ANNEXED TO RECEIVING CHRIST——*To as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God.*

The relation of sons ascribed to believers, in the text and context, seems to be ascribed to

them on two accounts; viz. their *regeneration*, and their *adoption*. The one is expressed in verse 13th. "Who were born, not of blood, nor of the "will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of "God." This consists in a re-impression of the divine image, and is introduced to account for some having received Christ, while others received him not. The other is denominated a *power* or *privilege*, and belongs to our restoration to the divine favour.

It was a high honour conferred on our species from the beginning for God to call himself their Father; an honour extended, as it would seem, to no other part of the lower creation. His tender mercies indeed are over all his works; but man was created in his image. "In the image of "God created he him:" men therefore are ranked amongst the children of the Most High. Nor was it a mere name: the love of the Creator was truly that of a Father. We see this expressed in the strongest manner even in the punishment of the wicked, as though it were against the grain of his native goodness, and as though nothing but a conduct exceedingly offensive could have induced him to do what he did. Such are the ideas in the following passages. "And the Lord said, I will "destroy man *whom I have created*, from the face

" of the earth—*He that made them* will not have " mercy on them, and *he that formed them* will " shew them no favour."* And though it sometimes appears as if sin had in a manner extinguished his paternal goodness, yet in exercising mercy through his Son, he still calls to remembrance the original relation. "I will not con- " tend for ever, neither will I be always wroth; " for the spirit should fail before me, and the " souls *which I have made.*"† What an evil and bitter thing then must sin be to have induced so good a God to disown us as *aliens*, and to require that if we be again admitted into his family, it shall be by *adoption*, a proceeding to which men have recourse when they wish to favour children that are not their own!

The kindness of God towards Israel is described as an " adoption." Their deplorable condition in Egypt is represented by that of a helpless infant left to perish in the open field in the day that it was born, and the favour conferred upon them by the kindness of a benevolent stranger, who passing by at the time had compassion on it, and adopted it as his own. This however though an act of grace, and through a mediator,

* Gen. vi. 7. Isai. xxvii. 11. † Isai. lvii. 16.

yet was only a shadow of that blessing which is bestowed on them who believe in Jesus Christ. It separated them from other nations, and conferred on them distinguished privileges, but it ascertained no inheritance beyond the grave. This, on the contrary, not only puts us among the children, but gives us an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away. The depth of alienation and disgrace from which it takes us, with the height of glory to which it raises us, accounts for that strong language which is more than once used in describing it. "But I "said, How shall I put thee among the chil- "dren?—Behold, what manner of love the Fa- "ther hath bestowed upon us, that we should be "called the sons of God!"*

The adoption of children is reckoned among those spiritual blessings wherewith the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ hath blessed them that believe in him, having predestinated them to it by Jesus Christ unto himself, according to the good pleasure of his will. With all other spiritual blessings, its bestowment is in consequence of our *having been* predestinated to it; but the thing itself, like justification, is a blessing

* Jer. iii. 19. 1 John iii. 1.

of time, and follows on believing. It were absurd to speak of our being predestinated to that which was in itself eternal. The privilege itself is held up as an inducement to forsake the family of Satan, and be separated from them. "Come "ye out from among them, and be ye separate, "saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean "thing; and I will receive you, and ye shall be "my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almigh-"ty."*

But the connexion between receiving Christ, and having power to become the sons of God, is designed not only to mark the order of time, but that of nature, or to shew the influence of the one upon the other. "We are all the children of God "*by faith in Christ Jesus.*"† This is exactly the same language as is used of our justification; and the blessing is obtained in the same way; not in reward of the act of believing, but out of respect to him in whom we believe. He that believeth on the Son is joined or united to him, and as such, by the constitution of the covenant of grace, becomes interested in all his benefits. It is thus that we are justified by faith, and it is thus that we are adopted. Christ, in reward of his

* Ephes. i. 3—5 † Gal. iii. 26.

obedience unto death, is appointed "heir of all "things;"* and we receiving him, are received into God's family for his sake, and become "joint-heirs with him." Such is the delightful harmony of the gospel, and such the way in which "the "adoption of children is *by Jesus Christ* unto "himself, *to the praise and glory of his grace.*"†

Regeneration gives us a new nature, and adoption adds to it a *new name*, even that of sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty. Nor is it a mere name; for the richest blessings both in this world and that which is to come are attached to it. Of these we may reckon the following as the principal——

First, *Access to God as our own God and Father.* During our unbelief, whatever were our necessities or troubles, we had no access to God. Though under the pangs of woe we might cry for mercy, yet it was unavailing. How should it be otherwise, when we set at nought the only name by which a sinner can be introduced, and his cause obtain a hearing? But believing in Jesus, we draw near to God, and God to us. The term rendered access,‡ in Ephes. iii. 12, signifies as

* Heb. i. 2. † Ephes. i. 6. ‡ Προσαγωγη

much as *introduction*, *manuduction*, or *a being taken by the hand*, as one who is introduced to a king by a third person; teaching us that we cannot be admitted to the divine presence by ourselves. While obedient, we had free access to our Creator; but having sinned, the door is shut upon us, and not a child of Adam can see his face but as introduced by the Mediator. As Job's friends, whose folly had offended the divine Majesty, were required to bring their offerings to Job, that he as a mediator might present them, and pray for the offenders, so it is with us in drawing near to God. All our offerings must be presented by the great and gracious Intercessor. Him will God accept. Coming in his name we have boldness, and access with confidence, by the faith of him. The spirit which is congenial with the gospel dispensation is not that of bondage, that we should be held in slavish fear, but that of adoption, whereby we cry Abba, Father; and if we do not actually possess it, it is because we are wanting to ourselves. A promise is left us of entering into rest, of which if we seem to come short, it is owing to unbelief. Did we but act up to our privileges, guilt would not lie rankling on our consciences in the manner it often does, nor would care corrode our peace, nor morbid melancholy eat up our enjoyments. Having

God for our Father, we should confess our sins to him, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son would cleanse us from all sin; we should cast all our care on him, who careth for us; we should be inordinately careful for nothing, but in every thing by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let our requests be made known unto God; and the effect would be that the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, would keep our hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Secondly, *Access to all the ordinances of God's house, and to the fellowship of his people.* From being "strangers and foreigners," we become "fellow citizens with the saints, and of the house-"hold of God." The church of God is here described as a *city*, and as a *household*. As a city, God is a wall of fire round about her, and the glory in the midst of her; blessing her provision, and satisfying her poor with bread. To be made free of this city, is no small favour. As a household, God is the Father of it, and as many as receive Christ, receive power to become its members, and to share in all the privileges of the family. There are believers, no doubt, whose situation does not admit of these social advantages, and others who are prevented by something amiss in the state of their own minds from embracing

them; but they do not excel in spirituality or in usefulness. It is as being planted in the house of the Lord that we may hope to flourish in the courts of our God.

Thirdly, *A part in the first resurrection.* The resurrection of the saints is called "the manifes-" tation of the sons of God—the glorious liberty " of the children of God—the adoption—the " redemption of our body."* It is the grand jubilee of the church, and even of the creation. Till then, the former as well as the latter will be held under a degree of bondage, as being yet subject to the effects of sin: but then Christ's promise shall be fulfilled, "I will raise them up at " the last day;" and the deliverance of the saints will be the signal for that of the creation, which during the apostasy has been unwillingly compelled to subserve its Creator's enemies, and which is therefore represented as waiting for and earnestly expecting the moment of deliverance. The last enemy being then destroyed, the war will be ended: death will be swallowed up in victory.

Lastly, *An interest in the eternal inheritance.* The natural inference from this divine relation is

* Rom. viii. 19—23.

this: "If children, then heirs; heirs of God, and "joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer "with him, that we may be glorified together."* With such thoughts our minds are overwhelmed; and no wonder, for an inspired apostle had no adequate conception of it. "Beloved, (says he) "now are we the sons of God; and it *doth not* "*yet appear what we shall be:* but we know that "when he shall appear we shall be like him, for "we shall see him as he is."†

Such are the leading privileges included in the power of becoming the sons of God, and which are sufficient to shew that though many reject the Saviour, yet it is not for want of kindness on his part towards those who accept of him.

III. *Let us observe* THE WISDOM OF GOD IN RENDERING THE RECEPTION OF CHRIST THE TURNING POINT OF SALVATION.

When a person who neither understands nor believes the gospel way of salvation thinks on the subject, it must appear to him a strange thing that so much should be made of Christ in the new testament, and of faith in him. He has no

* Rom. viii. 17. † 1 John iii. 2.

conception of it, or of the reason why it should be so. It was thus that the gospel was to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness; to them that believed, however, it was "the wisdom of God, and the power of God." There are three things in particular in which the wisdom of God appears in this adjustment of things.

First, It accords with the leading design of God in the gospel; namely, to *glorify his character and government in the salvation of sinners.* Receiving Christ, as we have seen already, is the corresponding idea to his being *given*, and that which answers to it, as the loops and taches of the tabernacle answered to one another. If the gift of Christ on God's part was necessary to secure the honour of his character and government in shewing mercy, the receiving of him on our part must also be necessary, as belonging to the same proceeding. Without this the gift would not answer its end. Hence, though God through the propitiation of his Son is "just and a justifier;" yet it is of him only that "believeth in Jesus."

If, instead of receiving Christ as God's free gift, and eternal life with him, we had received favour irrespective of him, God, so far as we can

conceive, must have compromised his honour. To shew favour to a sinner in the way he wishes for it, that is, in reward of what he calls his good works, would be consenting to vacate his throne at the desire of a rebel. It would be agreeing not only to pass over his past disobedience, and so to render null and void his own precepts, warnings, and threatenings, but to accept in future of just such obedience, and such a degree of it, as it suited his inclination to yield. "Offer it now unto "thy Governor; will he be pleased with thee, "and accept thy person, saith the Lord of "Hosts?"

But in receiving Christ, we acquiesce in the whole system of salvation by his death, as glorifying the character and government of God; we subscribe to the great evil of sin, and to the justice of our condemnation on account of it; we become of the same mind with Christ, and, in our measure, stand affected as he does, towards God, and man, and sin, and righteousness. That law which *was* within his heart, is *written* in ours. Thus it is that God and his government are glorified, not only by the gift of Christ to be a sacrifice, but in the reception of him as such by the believing sinner.

Secondly, It secures the honours of *grace*.—If, instead of receiving Christ as God's free gift, and eternal life through him, we had received favour irrespective of him, we should have considered ourselves as having whereof to glory. It would have appeared to us as it does and must appear to every one that hopes to be saved without an atonement, that the Almighty has no right to expect perfect obedience from imperfect creatures; that there is no such great evil in sin as that it should deserve everlasting punishment; that if God were to be strict to mark iniquity, according to the threatenings of the bible, he would be unjust; and therefore that in shewing mercy he only makes just allowance for the frailties of his creatures, and acts as a good being must needs act. Thus it is that the very idea of grace is excluded, and the sinner feels himself on terms with his Creator. But in receiving Christ, and salvation through his death, these imaginations are cast down, and all such high thoughts subdued to the obedience of Christ. He that has been disputing with his Maker for a number of years, at once finds the ground sink under him, all his arguments answered, and himself reduced to the character of a supplicant at the feet of his offended Sovereign.

It is as hard a thing for a proud and carnal heart to receive Christ, and salvation by grace through him, as it is to keep the whole law. If therefore we expect the good news of the gospel to consist in something more suited to the inclinations, and not merely to the condition of sinners, we shall be disappointed. It is said of a certain character who some years since was banished from this country for attempting to revolutionize it, after the example of France, that he was offered a free pardon, if he would only acknowledge his fault, and petition the throne; but *he could not do it!* Such is the inability of men to receive the Saviour, and herein consists the damning sin of unbelief.

If our spirit were brought down to our situation as sinners, the most humiliating truths of the gospel, instead of offending us, would appear to be right, and wise, and glorious. We should feel that the dust was our proper place; or rather, if we had our deserts, the pit of perdition. We should consider ourselves as lying at the absolute discretion of God: instead of being stumbled at such an assertion of the divine sovereignty as that addressed to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I will "have mercy, and I will have compassion on

"whom I will have compassion," we should cordially subscribe it, and supplicate mercy only on that principle. And when we had obtained it we should never think of having made ourselves to differ, but freely acknowledge that it is by the grace of God that we are what we are. Our minds would be in perfect unison with the language of the Apostle to Timothy: "Who hath saved us, and called "us with an holy calling, not according to "our works, but according to his own purpose "and grace, which was given us in Christ "Jesus before the world began."

Thirdly, It provides for the interests of *holiness*.—In receiving Christ and salvation through him, we receive a doctrine that strikes at the very root of depravity. The Son of God was manifested to destroy the works of the devil; he therefore that receives him must from thence be at variance with them. We are not only justified but sanctified by the faith that is in him. The doctrine of the cross, while it gives peace to the conscience, purifies the heart. There is not a principle in it but what, if felt and acted upon, would cause the world to be dead to us, and us unto the world. The objections, therefore, that are made to

this doctrine, as being unfriendly to holiness, have no foundation in the doctrine itself, whatever may be seen in the lives of some that profess it.

From the whole, the first concern of a sinner is to receive the Saviour. It ought to be no question whether he *may* receive him, since the gospel is addressed to every creature, and its invitations to the "stout-hearted and far "from righteousness." The only question is, Whether he be *willing* to receive him. To a spectator unacquainted with the depravity of human nature, it must be beyond measure surprising that this should be a question, and indeed few men can be convinced that it is: yet if it were not, there would be no difficulty in receiving him. "Why do ye not understand my "speech? Because ye cannot hear my word:" that is, because ye are averse to it. But no man will be able to excuse this his aversion, which is itself sin. The Judge of all the earth makes no allowance for it, nor for its not having been removed by divine grace. Grace is never represented in the scriptures as necessary to our accountableness; but as a free gift which God might justly withhold. It is deemed sufficient to justify the condemnation of sinners, that they

were averse to the gospel and government of Christ. "Take these mine enemies that *would* "*not* that I should reign over them, and slay "them before me."

Should it be objected, that these principles must tend to drive a sinner to despair: I answer by asking, What sinner? Not him whose desires are towards the Saviour; not him whose prayer is, "Turn thou me, and I shall be turned;"—if any, it must be him who has no desire after God; and even in his case, the despair is not absolute, but merely on supposition of his continuing in that state of mind. But this to him is most necessary; for till a sinner despairs of obtaining mercy in the way he is in, he will never fall at the feet of sovereign grace, and so will never be saved. As he that would be wise must first become a fool that he may be wise; so he that layeth hold of the hope set before him in the gospel must first relinquish his hopes from every other quarter.

SERMON VII.

ROMANS iii. 24.

Being justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.

THE doctrine expressed in this passage runs through the Epistle, and constitutes the scope of it. It is taught in many other parts of scripture, but here it is established by a connected body of evidence. Both Heathens and Jews are proved to be under sin, and consequently incapable of being justified on the ground of their own obedience by a righteous God. As to the former, they were wicked in the extreme. If any thing could have been alleged in excuse of them it had been their *ignorance*, but even this failed. They had means of knowledge sufficient to

render them "without excuse;" but having neglected them, and cast off God, God gave them up to their own corrupt affections and propensities; so that even the philosophic Greeks and Romans were "full of all ungodliness and unrighteousness, holding, or rather *withholding* the truth which they understood above the common people, in unrighteousness." But if heathens could not be justified, yet did not they who had the oracles of God stand on higher ground? Not so; for those very oracles describe men as "all gone out of the way, as having become unprofitable, as none of them doing good, no not one;" and what revelation saith, it saith of them who were under the light of it. Israel, therefore, was a part of the corrupt mass. The sum is, "Every mouth is stopped, and all the world become guilty before God.—By the deeds of the law no flesh living can be justified in his sight."

These sentiments, contained in the first three chapters of the epistle, make way for the following interesting statement: "But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets: even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ, unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference: for all have sinned, and

come short of the glory of God: Being justified freely by his grace, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus: whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God: to declare I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him who believeth in Jesus."

I call this an *interesting* statement, for of all the questions that can occupy the human mind, there is none of greater importance than that which relates to the way of acceptance with God. We learn, not only from the scriptures, but from our own consciences, that we are accountable creatures; but how we shall stand before the holy Lord God, is a question that overwhelms us. If there were no hope from the gospel, we must despair. We must appear before the judgment-seat, but it would be only to be convicted and condemned. The doctrine, therefore, that shews a way in which God can be just and yet a justifier, must be interesting beyond expression. This is, in substance, the good news to be proclaimed to every creature.

Justification by grace has been thought by some to be inconsistent with justification through the

atonement and righteousness of Christ. Yet it is here expressly said to be of grace, and as though that were not enough, *freely* by grace: nor is the sacred writer less express concerning its meritorious cause, than concerning its source or origin: it was not only of free grace, but *through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus.*

In every kind of justification in which justice is regarded, there is some ground or reason for the proceeding. In ordinary cases among men this ground or reason is found in the character of the prisoner. He is considered as innocent, and therefore is acquitted. In the justification of a sinner by the Judge of all, it is the "redemption which is in Christ Jesus." That which innocence is to the one, the redemption of Christ is to the other: it is his *righteousness*, or that in consideration of which, being imputed to him, he is justified.

In discoursing upon this great subject I shall endeavour to ascertain the meaning of the term—give proof of the doctrine—and show the consistency of its being of free grace, and yet through the redemption of Jesus Christ.

I. LET US ENDEAVOUR TO ASCERTAIN THE MEANING OF THE TERM JUSTIFICATION.—Many

errors on this important subject may be expected to have arisen from the want of a clear view of the thing itself. Till we understand what justification is, we cannot affirm or deny any thing concerning it but with great uncertainty.

It is not the making a person righteous by an inherent change from sin to righteousness: this is *sanctification*, which though no less necessary than the other, yet is distinguished from it. Christ is "made unto us righteousness, *and* sanctification."* The term is forensic, referring to the proceedings in a court of judicature, and stands opposed to *condemnation*. This is evident from many passages of scripture, particularly the following—"He that *justifieth* the wicked, and he that *condemneth* the just, even they both are abomination to the Lord—The judgment was by one to *condemnation:* but the free gift is of many offences unto *justification*—There is now therefore no *condemnation* to them that are in Christ Jesus—It is God that *justifieth:* who is he that *condemneth?* He that believeth on him that sent me hath everlasting life, and shall not come into *condemnation*, but is passed from death unto life."† If a prisoner who stands charged with a crime

* 1 Cor. i. 30. † Prov. xvii. 15. Rom. v. 16. viii. 1, 33, 34. John v. 24.

be convicted of it, he is *condemned:* if otherwise, he is acquitted or justified.

But though it be true that the term is forensic, and stands opposed to condemnation, yet, as in most other instances in which the proceedings of God allude to those of men, they are *not in all respects alike.* He that is justified in an earthly court, (unless it be for want of evidence, which cannot possibly apply in this case,) is really considered as being innocent, and his justification is no other than an act of justice done to him. He is acquitted because he appears to deserve acquittal. But this is not the justification of the gospel, which is "of grace, through the redemption of Jesus Christ."—Justification in the first case, in proportion as it confers honour on the justified, reflects dishonour on his accusers: but in the last, the justice of every charge is admitted, and no dishonour reflected on any party but himself.—Justification among men is opposed not only to condemnation, but even to *pardon:* for in order to this, the prisoner must be found guilty, whereas in justification he is acquitted as innocent. But gospel justification, though distinguishable from pardon, yet is not opposed to it. On the contrary, pardon is an essential branch of it. Pardon it is true, only removes the curse due to

sin, while justification confers the blessing of eternal life: but without the former, we could not possess the latter. He that is justified requires to be pardoned, and he that is pardoned is also justified. Hence *a blessing* is pronounced on him whose iniquities are forgiven; hence also the apostle argues from the non-imputation of sin to the imputation of righteousness, considering the blessedness of him to whom God imputeth not sin as a description of the blessedness of him to whom he imputeth righteousness without works.*— Finally, justification at a human bar *prevents* condemnation; but gospel justification finds the sinner under condemnation, and delivers him from it. It is described as "passing from death to life."†

From these dissimilarities, and others which I doubt not might be pointed out, it must be evident to every thinking mind, that though there are certain points of likeness, sufficient to account for the use of the term, yet we are not to learn the scripture doctrine of justification from what is so called in the judicial proceedings of human courts, and in various particulars cannot safely reason from one to the other. The principal points of likeness respect not the *grounds* of the proceeding, but the *effects* of it. Believing in Jesus we are

* Rom. iv. 6—8. † John v. 24.

united to him; and being so, are treated by the Judge of all as one with him; his obedience unto death is imputed to us, or reckoned as ours: and we for his sake are delivered from condemnation as though we had been innocent, and entitled to eternal life as though we had been perfectly obedient.

But let us farther inquire, *What is gospel justification?* Alluding to justification in a court of judicature it has been common to speak of it as a *sentence*. This sentence has been considered by some divines, as passing—first, in the mind of God from eternity - second, on Christ and the elect considered in him when he rose from the dead—third, in the conscience of a sinner on his believing. Justification *by faith* in the view of these divines, denotes either justification by Christ the object of faith, or the manifestation to the soul of what previously existed in the mind of God.

Others, who have been far from holding with justification as a decree in the divine mind, have yet seemed to consider it as a manifestation, impression, or persuasion in the human mind. They have spoken of themselves and others as being justified under such a sermon, or at such an hour: when all that they appear to mean is, that at such

a time they had a strong impression or persuasion that they were justified.

In respect of the first of these statements, it is true that justification, and every other spiritual blessing, was included in that "purpose and grace which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began;" but as the *actual bestowment* of other blessings supposes the existence of the party, so does justification. Christ was "raised again *for* our justification," in the same sense as he died for the pardon of our sins. Pardon and justification were *virtually* obtained by his death and resurrection; and to this may be added our glorification was obtained by his ascension, for we were not only "quickened together with him, and raised up together," but "made to sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus."* But as this does not prove that we were from thence *actually* glorified, neither do the other prove that we were actually pardoned or justified.

Whatever justification is, the scriptures represent it as taking place on our *believing* in Christ. It is not any thing that belongs to *predestination*, but something that intervenes between that and glorification. "Whom he did *predestinate*, them

* Ephes. ii. 5, 6.

he also called: and whom he called, them he also *justified:* and whom he justified, them he also *glorified.*" That which the scriptures call justification is by faith in Jesus Christ: and is sometimes spoken of as future, which it could not be if it were before our actual existence. For example, "Seeing it is one God who *shall* justify the circumcision by faith, and the uncircumcision by faith—Now it was not written for Abraham's sake alone that it was imputed to him; but for us also, to whom it *shall be imputed,* if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead—The scripture *foreseeing* that God *would justify* the heathen through faith, &c."* If justification were God's decree finally to acquit, condemnation must be his decree finally to condemn. But every unbeliever, whether elect or non-elect, is under condemnation, as the scriptures abundantly teach:† condemnation therefore cannot be God's decree finally to condemn. Saul of Tarsus while an unbeliever was under condemnation, yet God had not appointed him to wrath, but to obtain salvation by Jesus Christ. The sum is, neither condemnation nor justification consist in the secret purpose of God, but in his will as revealed or declared, as by a sentence in open court.

* Rom. iii. 30. iv. 24. Gal. iii. 8. † John iii. 18, 36. v. 24.

And as justification is not a purpose in the divine mind, neither is it *a manifestation to, an impression on,* or *a persuasion of, the human mind.* That there are *manifestations* to believers is admitted. God *manifests* himself unto them as he doth not unto the world. The things of God which are hidden from the wise and prudent, are *revealed* to them. But these are not things which were previously locked up in the divine purposes, but things which were already revealed in the scriptures, and which were previously hidden from them, as they still are from unbelievers, by their own criminal blindness. God does not reveal his secret counsels to men otherwise than by fulfilling them. To pretend to a revelation or manifestation of that which is not contained in the scriptures, is pretending to be inspired in the same extraordinary manner as were the prophets and apostles.

If justification consists in a manifestation, impression, or persuasion that we are justified, condemnation must be a like impression or persuasion that we are condemned: but this is not true. The Jews who opposed Christ were under condemnation; yet so far from being impressed or persuaded of any such thing, they had no doubt but God was their Father.

Believers in Jesus on the other hand may at times be impressed with strong apprehensions of divine wrath, while yet they are not exposed to it. Neither justification, therefore, nor condemnation consist in the persuasion of the mind that we are under the one or the other. Besides, to make a thing consist in a persuasion of the truth of that thing, is palpable absurdity. There can be no well-grounded persuasion of the truth of any thing, unless it be true and evident, antecedent to our being persuaded of it.

Justification is a relative change, not *in*, or *upon*, but *concerning* us. It relates to our standing with respect to God the Law-giver and Judge of all. It is "passing from death to life" in respect of the law: as when the sentence against a malefactor is not only remitted, but he is withal raised to honour and dignity. It is our standing acquitted by the *revealed will of God declared in the gospel.* As "the wrath of God is *revealed from heaven,*" in the curses of his law; so "the righteousness of God is *revealed from faith to faith,*" in the declarations of the gospel.* It is in this *revelation* of the mind of God in his word I conceive that the *sentence* both of condemnation and justification consists. He whom the scriptures

* Rom. i. 17, 18.

bless is blessed; and he whom they curse is cursed."

As transgressors of the holy, just, and good law of God, we are all by nature children of wrath. All the threatenings of God are in full force against us, and were we to die in that condition we must perish everlastingly. This is to be under *condemnation*. But condemnation, awful as it is, is not damnation. The sentence is not executed, nor is it irrevocable. God so loved the world that he gave his only begotton Son, that WHOSOEVER BELIEVETH IN HIM SHOULD NOT PERISH, BUT HAVE EVERLASTING LIFE. From hence the sinner stands in a new relation to God as a Law-giver. He is no longer "under the law" with respect to its condemning power, but "under grace." As the manslayer on having entered the city of refuge was, by a special constitution of mercy, secure from the avenger of blood; so the sinner, having "fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before him," is, by the gracious constitution of the gospel, secured from the curse. All those threatenings which belonged to him heretofore, no longer stand against him, but are reckoned by the Judge of all as having been executed on Jesus his substitute, who was "made a curse for us." On the other hand, all the blessings

and promises in the book of God belong to him, and die when he may, eternal life is his portion. This is that state into which every believer is translated on his becoming a believer; and herein I conceive, consists the blessing of justification.

There are a few points pertaining to the subject which yet require illustration; namely,—What it is in the redemption of Christ to which the scriptures ascribe its *efficacy*—What is the concern of *faith* in justification, and why it is ascribed to this grace rather than to any other—Finally,—Whether justification includes the pardon of our sins, *past, present, and to come.*

First: Let us inquire, What it is in the redemption of Christ to which the scriptures ascribe its efficacy? Justification is ascribed to *his blood*, and to his *obedience.** By the blood of Christ is meant the shedding of his blood, or the laying down of his life, and by his obedience all that conformity to the will of God which led to this great crisis. He was "obedient unto death."† By the death of Christ sin is said to be "purged," or expiated; ‡ and sinners to be "redeemed," "reconciled," and "cleansed from all sin,"§ and

* Rom. v. 9, 19. † Phil. ii. 8. ‡ Heb. i. 3. § 1 Pet. i. 19. Rom. v. 10. 1 John i. 7.

by his obedience, many are said to be "made righteous." This his obedience unto death was more than the *means* of salvation: it was the procuring *cause* of it. Salvation was the effect of the "travail of his soul." We may be instruments in saving one another; but Christ was "the *author* of eternal salvation."* The principle of substitution, or of one standing in the place of others, being admitted by the Sovereign of the Universe, he endured that which *in its effect on the divine government was equivalent to the everlasting punishment of a world;* and did that which *it was worthy of God to reward with eternal glory, not only on himself, but on all those on whose behalf he should intercede!* What is there then in this his obedience unto death, that should render it capable of producing such important effects? To this question the scriptures make answer as follows—"We are redeemed by the *precious* blood of Christ—The blood of Jesus Christ *his Son cleanseth* us from all sin—Who being the *brightness of his glory*, and the *express image of his person, and upholding all*

* The redemption of Christ may indeed be considered as a *mean* or *medium* in respect of the *first cause*. Thus it stands distinguished from grace in the text: *that* is the source whence it sprang; *this* the medium through which it flows. The redemption of Christ is not the *cause* of the Father's grace; but that in *consideration* of which it is exercised.

things by the word of his power, when he had BY HIMSELF expiated our sins, went and sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high." If there be any meaning in language, the efficacy of the sufferings and work of Christ is here ascribed to the dignity of his person, and that dignity amounts to nothing short of his proper deity. The scriptures often ascribe the miracles of Christ, the strength by which he was borne up in his sufferings, and his resurrection from the dead, to the power of the Father: for being "in the form of a servant," it was fit that he should be supplied, and supported, and vindicated, by HIM whose servant he was;* but when the *value* or *virtue* of his interposition is spoken of, it is ascribed to the intrinsic glory of his person as the Son of God. We inquire,

Secondly.—What is the concern of *faith* in justification, and why is it ascribed to this grace rather than to any other?—Were we to conceive of the gospel as a new "remedial law," and of faith as the first principle of obedience constituting the condition of it, or that which God graciously consented to accept as the term of justification instead of a perfect conformity to the old law, we should be greatly beside the

* John iii. 24. Isai xlii. 1. Acts ii. 24.

gospel plan. The gospel plan of justification "excludes boasting," and that as excluding "works:" but justification, on this principle excludes not works, but merely works of a certain description. There *is* on this principle, a law, that can give life, and righteousness after all is by law.* If we are justified by any doings of our own, whatever they are, we have "whereof to glory." Whether we call them legal or evangelical, if they be the *consideration* on which we are forgiven and accepted, we are not justified "freely by grace," and boasting is not excluded.

It is said to be "of faith that it might be by grace."† There must therefore be something in the nature of faith which peculiarly corresponds with the free grace of the gospel; something which looks out of self and receives the free gifts of heaven as being what they are, pure undeserved favour. We need not reduce it to a mere exercise of the intellectual faculty, in which there is nothing holy; but whatever holiness there is in it, it is not this, but the obedience of Christ that constitutes our justifying righteousness. Whatever other properties the magnet may possess, it is as pointing invariably to the north that it guides the mariner; and whatever

* Gal. iii. 21. † Rom. iv. 16.

other properties faith may possess, it is as receiving Christ, and bringing us into union with him that it justifies.

In order to be interested in justification, and other blessings arising from the obedience and death of Christ, we must first be interested in *Christ himself*: for it is as "having the Son" that we "have everlasting life."* The benefits of Christ's obedience unto death require to be received in the same order as that in which they are given. As God first "gives *him*," so we must first receive *him*, "and with him all things freely."† Many would wish for the benefits of Christ's death who yet have no desire after Christ. Like him that was nearest of kin to the family of Elimelech, they would on various accounts be pleased with the inheritance; but when it is understood that in order to possess it, they must take *him*, with all that pertains to him, and that this would mar their present inheritance, they give it up.

Thus it is that justification is ascribed to faith, because it is by faith that we receive Christ; and thus it is by *faith only*, and not by any other grace. Faith is peculiarly a *receiving* grace, which none

* 1 John v. 12. † Rom. viii. 32.

other is. Were we said to be justified by repentance, by love, or by any other grace, it would convey to us the idea of something good in us being the *consideration* on which the blessing was bestowed; but justification by faith conveys no such idea. On the contrary, it leads the mind directly to Christ in the same manner as saying of a person that he lives by *begging* leads to the idea of his living on *what he freely receives.*

It is thus that justification stands connected in the scriptures with *union* with Christ. "Of him are ye *in* Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us righteousness—There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are *in* Christ Jesus—That I may be found *in* him, not having mine own righteousness which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith."* From these and other passages, we perceive that faith justifieth, not in a way of merit, not on account of any thing in itself, be it what it may, but as uniting us to Christ. It is that which the act of marriage is on the part of a female: by it she becomes one with her husband, and (whatever might be her former poverty) legally interested in all that he possesses. Having him, she hath all that is his.

* 1 Cor. i. 30. Rom. viii. 1. Phil. iii. 9.

Thus it is that Christ being "heir of all things," believers in him become "heirs of God," not in their own right, but as "joint heirs with him."* And as in a marriage-union the wealth which an indigent female might derive from the opulence of her husband would not be in *reward* of her having received him, so neither is justification the reward of faith, but of the righteousness which is of God by faith.

Great things are ascribed to faith in a way of *healing*. Many of the miraculous cures performed by our Lord are ascribed to the faith of the parties. The "virtue," however, proceeded, not from faith, but from him. It is the same in justification. By faith we receive the benefit, but the benefit arises not from faith, but from Christ. Hence the same thing which is ascribed in some places to faith, is in others ascribed to the obedience, death, and resurrection of Christ.

Thirdly, and lastly: We inquire, Whether justification includes the pardon of our sins, *past, present, and to come?* That it includes the pardon of sin, has been proved already from Rom. iv. 6, 7; and seeing it is promised of him that believeth that he "shall not come into condemnation," it

* Heb. i. 2. Rom. viii. 17.

must in some way secure the pardon of all his sins, and the possession of eternal life. Yet to speak of sins as being pardoned before they are repented of, or even committed, is not only to maintain that on which the scriptures are silent, but to contradict the current language of their testimony. If all our sins, past, present, and to come, were *actually* forgiven, either when Christ laid down his life, or even on our first believing, why did David speak of "confessing his transgression," and of God "forgiving his iniquity?"* Why did Solomon teach us that "He that confesseth and forsaketh his sin shall find mercy?" Why did our Lord direct us in our daily prayers to say, "Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors;" and why add, "If ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Heavenly Father forgive you your trespasses?" Finally, Why did the apostle John teach us that "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness?"

Nor is it sufficient to understand this language of the *manifestation* of forgiveness to the mind. Forgiveness is not opposed to merely withholding the comforts of religion, but to "laying our sins to our charge." The parable of

* Psalm xxxii. 5.

the servant who took his fellow-servant by the throat, and was delivered by his lord to the tormentors, is thus applied by our Lord, "*So* likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses!"* This undoubtedly means more than withholding a sense of forgiveness in the present life. Nor is there any thing in all this inconsistent with the certain perseverance of true believers; or with the promise that "they shall not come into condemnation." The truth taught us in this promise is not that if after believing in Christ, we live in sin, and die without repentance, we shall nevertheless escape condemnation: but that provision is made in behalf of believers that they shall *not live in sin;* and when they sin that they shall *not die without repentance*, but return to God, and so obtain forgiveness. The promise of non-condemnation includes that of repentance and perseverance. "I will put my law in their hearts, and they shall not depart from me."

We may think, if the Lord has appointed us to obtain salvation by Jesus Christ, whatever be our conduct, he will never threaten us with any thing beyond a severe chastisement: but Christ

* Matt. xviii. 23—35.

did not act in this manner towards his disciples. He not only gave the unforgiving to expect no forgiveness at the hand of God, but enforced the giving up of that which *caused them to offend*, though it were as dear as a right hand or a right eye, on pain of being *cast into hell fire!* He allowed no one while in an evil course to take it for granted that he was nevertheless a good man; but pointed him to the end whither that course if persisted in would lead him. Warnings are as necessary in some circumstances as encouragements are in others; and their being enforced on pain of eternal destruction may be the appointed means of saving us from it.

SERMON VIII.

ROMANS iii. 24.

Being justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.

HAVING shown what I conceive to be meant by justification, I proceed to the next head of discourse; namely,

II. TO OFFER EVIDENCE IN SUPPORT OF THE DOCTRINE: OR TO PROVE THAT WE ARE NOT JUSTIFIED BY ANY WORKS OF OUR OWN, BUT OF FREE GRACE, THROUGH THE REDEMPTION OF JESUS CHRIST.

There are but two ways in which creatures can be justified before God: one is by works, the other by grace. If we had been obedient to the holy,

just, and good law of our Creator, that obedience would have been our *righteousness*, and we should have been justified on the ground of it: for "the man that doeth those things shall live by them."* But having all sinned, we have come short of the glory of God. Instead of gaining his favour, we stand exposed to his righteous curse; for thus it is written, "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things written in the book of the law to do them."†

We need not inquire on this subject into the *degrees* of evil, or whether we have gone greater lengths in sin than other men: for if we had only broken *one* of God's righteous commandments, that were an everlasting bar to our justification. As well might a murderer lead in arrest of judgment that he had killed only *one* man. The number of our sins will doubtless heighten the degrees of punishment, but it is the nature of them that insures condemnation. Nor does this disprove the equity of the law: for we cannot break a single precept without contemning the divine authority, which at once destroys the principle of obedience to every other. We may not actually go into all other sins: but it is not *the love of God* that restrains us: it is interest, or fear, or

* Rom. x. 5. † Gal. iii. 10.

regard to our own reputation that holds us back. On this principle "he who offendeth but in one point is said to be guilty of all:" for HE THAT SAID, Do not commit adultery, said also, Do not kill. Now if thou commit no adultery, yet if thou kill, thou art become a transgressor of the law."* But if a single offence be an everlasting bar to justification by our own works, what ground can there be to hope for it, when our whole lives have been one continued series of revolt?

We are all transgressors, and as such under the curse. Here too we might have been left to perish. God was not obliged in justice, or in honour to interpose in behalf of a seed of evil doers. The law by which we stand condemned being "holy, just, and good," might have been executed, and no reproach would have attached to the divine character. Having sided with Satan against God, we might justly have had our portion with him and his angels. All who were not themselves implicated, and disaffected to the divine government, would have said, "True and righteous are thy judgments, O Lord." And we ourselves, at the last judgment, should not have been able to open our mouths against it.

* James ii. 10, 11.

And now that "God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins," hath interposed and revealed a way in which he can be "just and the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus," shall it be objected to by us? Shall man, lying as he does under the dominion of sin, and the righteous condemnation of heaven on account of it, shall man take state to himself, and be ever aspiring to be justified on the ground of at least his comparative righteousness? Such, however, is the fact.—When the first-born son of fallen Adam brought his offering, he came as though he had never sinned; bringing no sacrifice, and yet entertaining high expectations of success. Hence when the signal of acceptance was withheld, his countenance fell. Thus it is that millions are bringing their offerings to this day, overlooking "the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world." All the false religions that have existed, or do now exist in the world are so many modifications of a self-righteous spirit; so many devices to appease the conscience and propitiate the Deity.

Nor is it confined to Heathens, Mahometans, and Jews: there are professing Christians who are very explicit in avowing their dependence upon their

own works.* Where the divinity and atonement of Christ are disavowed, this is no more than may be expected. But neither is it confined to such. Many who profess to believe these doctrines, yet seem to consider the grand object of the death of Christ to have been, that he might obtain for us, that repentance, faith, and sincere obedience should be accepted as the ground of justification instead of sinless perfection.†

* "When will Christians permit themselves to believe that the same conduct which gains them the approbation of good men here, will secure the favour of heaven hereafter?"

Mrs. BARBAULD.

"Repentance and a good life are of themselves sufficient to recommend us to the divine favour." Dr. PRIESTLEY.

"The practice of virtue is always represented as the *only means* of attaining happiness, both here and hereafter."

Mr. BELSHAM.

† This seems to be the idea of Bishop BUTLER. "The doctrine of the gospel, he says, appears to be not only that Christ taught the efficacy of repentance; but rendered it of the efficacy which it is, by what he did and suffered for us; that he obtained for us the benefit of having our repentance accepted unto eternal life: not only that he revealed to sinners that they were in a capacity of salvation, and how they might obtain it; but, moreover, that he put them into this capacity of salvation, by what he did and suffered for them; put us into a capacity of escaping future punishment, and obtaining future happiness."—*Analogy, Part II. Chap.* 5. *p.* 305.—Christ, it seems, was no otherwise our *Saviour*, than as enabling us to save ourselves!

Many who, in consequence of being educated under a gospel ministry, disavow in words all dependence on their own works, are nevertheless manifestly under the influence of a self-righteous spirit. They do not confess their faults one to another, but justify themselves as far as possible, and wherein they fail in this, will invent so many pleas and excuses as shall extenuate the sin to little or nothing. They are not self-diffident, nor humble, but the contrary; "trusting in themselves that they are righteous, and despising others," just as the pharisee did the publican. They *thank God* for being what they are, and so did the pharisee: but as words in the one case signified nothing, neither do they in the other.

To this may be added, It is not an unusual thing for those who have been awakened to a serious concern about salvation to overlook the Saviour, and to build their hopes on the consideration of the *tears they have shed, the prayers they have offered,* and *the pains they have taken* in religion. But if it should prove that all confidences of this sort are only a refined species of self-righteous hope, and that the first substantial relief of a sinner arises from a belief of the gospel way of salvation, the consequences may be no less fatal

than if they had never wept, nor prayed, nor taken any pains in religion.

One thing is certain: we must be justified wholly of grace, or wholly of works; for there is no medium, "If it be by grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. If, on the other hand, it be of works, then is it no more of grace: otherwise work is no more work." Taking it for granted that what God hath revealed in his word is the only sure ground on which to rest a matter of such high importance, I shall state what appears to me the scripture evidence for the first of these methods of justification, under the following particulars.

First, THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD DOES NOT ADMIT OF A SINNER'S BEING JUSTIFIED ON THE GROUND OF HIS OWN DOINGS. It belongs to the righteousness or justice of God to do justice to his own character. But to pardon and accept of sinners on account of any thing done by them were to fly in the face his own law and government: which if any thing could cause both them and him to be treated with contempt, this proceeding must do it. "It BECAME HIM for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory to make the

Captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings—Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his *righteousness* for the remission of sins—For they being ignorant of God's *righteousness*, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God."* If these passages do not convey the idea of its being inconsistent with the righteous character of God to pardon and accept of sinners in consideration of their own doings, I can conceive of no determinate idea conveyed by them. If it was *becoming* the divine perfections to bring sinners to glory through a suffering Saviour, it would have been unbecoming those perfections to have brought them to glory in virtue of their own doings. If Christ was set forth to be a propitiation that God might declare his righteousness for the remission of sins, his righteousness would not have been declared in the remission of sins without it. Finally, If ignorance of God's righteousness were the reason of the non-submission of the Jews to the gospel way of justification, there must have been something in that truth directly opposed to justification in any other way, and which, had it been properly understood, would have cut up all hopes from

* Heb. ii. 10. Rom. iii. 25. x. 3.

every other quarter. It was in this way that Paul, when the righteous law of God appeared to him in its true light, *died* as to all hopes of being accepted of God by the works of it. It was "through the law" that he became "*dead* to the law, that he might live unto God."*

Secondly, THE SCRIPTURES IN A GREAT VARIETY OF LANGUAGE EXCLUDE ALL WORKS PERFORMED BY SINFUL CREATURES AS THE GROUND OF ACCEPTANCE WITH GOD. In proof of this the following passages are very express. "Moses describeth the righteousness which is of the law, that the man that doeth those things shall live by them. But the righteousness which is of faith speaketh on this wise—If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.—By the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight—Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? of works? Nay, but by the law of faith. Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith, without the deeds of the law—If Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory—Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace but of debt:

* Rom. vii. 9. Gal. ii. 19.

but to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness. Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man to whom the Lord imputeth righteousness without works—Israel who followed after the law of righteousness hath not attained to the law of righteousness. Wherefore? Because they sought it not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law: for they stumbled at that stumbling-stone—Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified—As many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things written in the book of the law to do them. But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God it is evident: for the just shall live by faith: and the law is not of faith; but the man that doth them shall live in them—Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law: ye are fallen from grace—Not of works, lest any man should boast—Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved

us . . . . . that being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs, according to the hope of eternal life."*

Distinctions have been made on this subject between the works of the *ceremonial* and those of the *moral* law, also between the works of the *law* and those of the *gospel;* as though it were not the design of the scriptures to exclude moral duties from being grounds of justification, but merely those which are ceremonial; or if it were, yet not the evangelical duties of repentance, faith, and sincere obedience. But whatever differences there may be between these things, they are all *works*, and all works of man are excluded from justification. If the foregoing passages be considered in their connexions, they will be found to respect all obedience, of every kind, which is performed by men, be it ceremonial or moral, or what it may. They teach justification by a righteousness *received* in opposition to a righteousness *done* or *performed*, and which leaves no room for boasting. If we were justified by faith itself considered as a duty of ours, or if the Lawgiver had respect to any conformity to God in us as the

* Rom. x. 5. iii. 20, 27, 28. iv. 2, 4—6. ix. 31, 32. Gal. ii. 16. iii. 10—12. v. 4. Ephes. ii. 9. Tit. iii. 5—7.

cause or reason of the sentence, there would be no meaning in such language as this, "To him that *worketh not* but *believeth* on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness."*

The language of the Apostle to the Galatians goes not only to exclude obedience to the ceremonial and the moral law, but *obedience to law in general*, as the ground of justification. The reason given why the law is not against the promises, or why it cannot furnish an objection to the free grace of the gospel, is this: If "there had been *a law* which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law."† This is equal to saying, the patient was given up as incurable by law before the promised grace of the gospel took him in hand: Whatever therefore is done by the latter cannot be objected to by the former. The terms νόμος and ἐκ νόμου, *law* and *by the law*, in verse 21, as observed by Dr. Guyse, shews it, according to Mr. Locke's rule of interpretation, to relate to law in general, or to any or every law. But if the works of every law be excluded, all distinctions between ceremonial and moral, or moral and evangelical are of no account.

* Rom. iv. 5. † Gal. iii. 21.

Thirdly, BEING JUSTIFIED "FREELY BY GRACE" IS ITSELF DIRECTLY OPPOSED TO BEING JUSTIFIED BY WORKS.—The term *grace* denotes *free favour to the unworthy*. If God had been obliged in justice or in honour to have done what he has done; if the law by which we were condemned were too strict, or the penalty annexed to it too severe; if Christ and the offer of salvation through him were a compensation given us on account of the injury we received from our connexion with our first parents, that which is called grace, would not be grace, but debt. There is just so much grace in the gospel as there is justice in the law, and no more. The opposition between grace and works in this important concern is so clear in itself, and so plainly marked by the apostle, that one can scarcely conceive how it can be honestly mistaken. "If it be by grace, then is it no more of works; otherwise grace is no more grace."

But strong as the term *grace* is, the apostle adds to its force. As though it were not enough for him to affirm that we are justified by grace, he saith we are justified *freely* by his grace. There is doubtless a redundancy in the expression; but the design of it is to strengthen the thought. Thus when he would forcibly express his idea of future glory, he uses a kind of

tautology for the purpose, calling it a "*far more, exceeding*, and eternal weight of glory." We are not only justified without any desert on our part, but contrary to it. As high as the heavens are above the earth, so are his thoughts in the forgiveness of sin, higher than our thoughts, and his ways than our ways. They who are justified are said to receive "abundance of grace," or grace abounding over all the aboundings of sin. Sin reigns over our species, subjugating them all to death: but grace conquers the conqueror, reigning through righteousness to eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord.

Fourthly, THE TERMS USED RELATIVE TO GOSPEL JUSTIFICATION, RENDER IT EVIDENT THAT IT IS NOT OUR OWN RIGHTEOUSNESS THAT IS IMPUTED TO US, BUT THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF ANOTHER.—"Abraham believed God, and it was *counted* unto him for righteousness. Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. But he that believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is *counted* for righteousness. David also describeth the blessedness of the man to whom the Lord *imputeth* righteousness without works, saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the

Lord will not *impute* sin.* The terms *imputed* and *counted* in this connexion are manifestly used to express not that just reckoning of righteousness to the righteous which gives to every man his due, but that gracious reckoning of righteousness to the unrighteous as though he were righteous. When the uncircumcised gentile kept the law, his uncircumcision was *counted* for circumcision: not that it really was such, but was graciously reckoned in the divine administration as if it were. When Paul, writing to Philemon concerning Onesimus, says, "If he hath wronged thee, or oweth thee ought, put that on mine account," he did not mean that he should treat him according to his deserts, but that he should forgive and accept him for his sake.

When *faith* is said to be counted for righteousness, it is as relating to Christ. The faith by which Abraham was justified had immediate relation to him as the promised seed; and it is easy to perceive in the new testament accounts of justifying faith a marked attention to the same thing. "Abraham believed God, and it was imputed to him for righteousness. Now it was not written for his sake alone that it was imputed to him; but for us also, to whom it shall be im-

* Rom. iv. 3—8.

puted if we *believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead; who was delivered for our offences, and raised again for our justification.*— By HIM *all that believe* are justified from all things —That God might be just, and the justifier of him that *believeth in Jesus.** "It is evident (says PRESIDENT EDWARDS,) that the subject of justification is looked upon as destitute of any righteousness in himself, by that expression, *It is counted, or imputed unto him for righteousness.* The phrase as the apostle uses it here, (Rom. iv. 5.) and in the context, manifestly imports, that God of his sovereign grace is pleased, in his dealings with the sinner, to take and regard that which indeed is not righteousness, and in one that has no righteousness, so that the consequence shall be the same as if he had righteousness; and which may be from the respect that it bears to something which is indeed righteous. It is as if he had said '*As to him that works,* there is no need of any gracious *reckoning* or *counting* it for righteousness, and causing the reward to follow as if it were a righteousness: for if he has works, he has that which is a righteousness in itself, to which the reward properly belongs."†

* Rom. iv. 22—25. Acts xiii. 39. Rom. iii. 26.

† *Sermon on Justification. p.* 9.

Fifthly, THE REWARDS PROMISED TO GOOD WORKS IN THE SCRIPTURES SUPPOSE THE PARTIES TO BE BELIEVERS IN CHRIST, AND SO, BEING ACCEPTED IN HIM, THEIR WORKS ALSO ARE ACCEPTED, AND REWARDED FOR HIS SAKE.—That good works have the promise of salvation is beyond dispute. Nothing that God approves shall go unrewarded. The least expression of faith and love, even the giving of a cup of cold water to a disciple of Christ *because he belongs to him*, will ensure everlasting life. But neither this, nor any other good work can be a ground of justification, inasmuch as it is *subsequent* to it. For works to have any influence on this blessing they require to precede it: but works before faith are never acknowledged by the scriptures to be good. It was testified of Enoch that he *pleased God*, from whence the apostle to the Hebrews infers that he was a believer, inasmuch as *without faith it is impossible to please God*.* "It does not consist with the honour of the Majesty of the King of heaven and earth, to accept of any thing from a condemned malefactor, condemned by the justice of his own holy law, till that condemnation be removed."† The Lord had respect first to *Abel, and then to his offering*. Even those works

* Heb. xi. 5, 6.

† *President Edwards's Sermon on Justification.*

which are the expressions of faith and love, have so much sinful imperfection attached to them, that they require to be presented by an intercessor on our behalf. The most spiritual sacrifices are no otherwise acceptable to God than *by Jesus Christ*.

Perhaps I ought not to conclude this part of the subject without noticing the apparent opposition between Paul and James; the one teaching that we are 'justified by faith, without the deeds of the law,' the other, that 'by works a man is justified, and not by faith only.* The words are doubtless apparently opposite, and so are those of Solomon, in which he directs us in one proverb *not* to answer, and in the next to *answer a fool according* to his folly. In reconciling these apparently opposite counsels, we are led by the reasons given for each to understand the terms as used in different senses; the first as directing us not to answer a fool *in a foolish manner*, for this would make us "like unto him;" the last to answer him *in a way suited to expose his folly*, "lest he be wise in his own conceit." In like manner the terms *faith* and *justification* were used by Paul and James in a different sense. By faith Paul meant that which worketh by love, and is

* Rom. iii. 28. James ii. 24.

productive of good fruits; but James speaks of a faith which is "dead, being alone." By justification Paul means the acceptance of a sinner before God; but James refers to his being approved of God as a true Christian. "Both these Apostles bring the case of Abraham in illustration of their principles; but then it is to be observed they refer to different periods and circumstances in the life of that Patriarch. Paul in the first instance says of Abraham, that he was justified by faith, while yet uncircumcised; this was his justification in *the sight of God*, and was without any consideration of his works. James refers to a period some years subsequent to this, when, in the offering up of his son, he was justified by works also; that is, his faith was shewn to be genuine by its fruits. Paul therefore refers to the acceptance of a sinner; James to the approbation of a saint."*

Supported by this body of scripture evidence, as well as by the experience we have had of the holy and happy influence of the doctrine, I trust we shall continue unmoved in our adherence to it. Let others boast of the efficacy of their own

* The word 'Justification' is used in this sense, Matt. xii. 37. 1 Cor. iv. 4.—See *Williams's Vindication against Belsham, p. p.* 145, 146.

virtues, we with the Apostle will count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus our Lord; will count all things but dung that we may win Christ, and be found in him, not having our own righteousness which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith.

SERMON IX.

ROMANS iii. 24.

Being justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.

HAVING endeavoured to explain and establish the doctrine of justification, it remains for me,

Thirdly, To SHEW THE CONSISTENCY OF ITS BEING OF FREE GRACE, AND YET THROUGH THE REDEMPTION OF JESUS CHRIST.—This is a subject of the last importance. Almost every thing pertaining to the way of salvation is affected by it. The principal reason alleged by those who reject the doctrine of atonement is, its inconsistency with grace. God needed nothing, they say, but his own goodness to induce him to shew mercy; or if he did, it is not of grace, seeing a

price is paid to obtain it. The question, however, does not respect the first moving cause of mercy, but the manner of shewing it. The friends of the doctrine of atonement allow that the sacrifice of Christ was not the cause, but the effect of the Father's love. They do not scruple to admit that his love was sufficient to have pardoned sinners without an atonement, provided it had been consistent with the righteousness of his character and government. "It is not the *sentiment*, but the *expression* of love" that requires an atonement. David was not wanting in love to his son Absalom; for "his soul longed to go forth" to him; but he felt for his honour as the head of a family and of a nation, which, had he admitted him immediately into his presence, would have been compromised, and the crime of murder connived at. Hence he for a time must be kept at a distance, and when introduced, it must be by a mediator. This statement which has been made in substance by our writers, many times over, has seldom, if ever, been fairly met by the other side. I never recollect, however, to have seen or heard any thing like a fair answer to it.

It is remarkable too that those who make this objection never appear to regard the doctrine of grace but for the purpose of making void the

atonement. On all other occasions grace is virtually disowned, and works are every thing; but here it is magnified, in much the same manner as the Father is honoured as the object of worship to the exclusion of the Son.

Cases may be supposed, I acknowledge, in which the ideas of grace and atonement would be inconsistent. First, *If the atonement were made by the offender, himself enduring the full penalty of the law*, his deliverance would be a matter of right, and there would be no grace in it. But, as in a case of murder, it is not in the sinner's power to make atonement for himself so as to survive his punishment. The punishment threatened against sin is "everlasting," which admits of no period when the penalty shall be endured. No man, therefore, can, by any length of suffering, redeem his own soul.

Secondly, *If the sufferings of another could avail for the offender, and he himself were to provide the substitute*, his deliverance might be a matter of right, and there might be no grace in it. But neither of these suppositions can exist in the case before us. Strict distributive justice could not admit of the innocent suffering for the guilty, even though the innocent were willing. Its lan-

guage is, "Whosoever hath sinned against me, him will I blot out of my book.* But if it could, the guilty party could not find a substitute that were either able or willing to stand in his place.

Thirdly, *If God himself should both consent to accept of a substitute, and actually provide one, yet if the acts and deeds of sinners be considered as literally becoming his, and his theirs, whatever grace there might be in the acceptance and provision of the substitute, there would be no place for the* FORGIVENESS *of the sinner, and justification would be merely an act of justice.* If Christ, in having our sins imputed to him became a sinner, and, as some have said, the greatest of all sinners, then in his sufferings he was only treated according to his desert: and that desert belonging to him could no longer belong to us, so that had we been in existence and known of it, we might from that moment have claimed our deliverance as a matter of right. And if we in having the righteousness of Christ imputed to us become that which he was, namely meritorious, or deserving of eternal life, then might we disown the character of supplicants, and approach the Judge of all in language suited to those who had always pleased him. But neither can this be. The acts

* Exod. xxxii. 33.

and deeds of one may *affect* others, but can in no case become actually theirs, or be so transferred as to render that justice which would otherwise have been of grace. The imputation of our sins to Christ, and of his righteousness to us does not consist in a transfer of either the one or the other, except in their effects. Christ suffered not because he *was*, but merely *as if he had been* the sinner; notwithstanding the imputation of sin to him, he died *the just for the unjust*. On the other hand, we are justified not because we *are*, but *as though we were* righteous; for the worthiness belongs to him and not to us.

Finally, *If justification through the redemption of Christ were considered as not only* CONSISTENT WITH *justice, but* REQUIRED BY *it, it must, I think, be allowed that every idea of grace is excluded.* That favour towards creatures which justice requires, must needs be their due, which leaves no room for grace. It is only of God's *essential* justice, however, that this is true, and not of his covenant righteousness, which relates to his own free engagements. God having pledged his word, would be "*unrighteous* to forget the work and labour of love" of his believing people; and thus it is that "If we confess our sins he is *faithful and just* to forgive us our sins." The righteous fulfilment

of engagements made in a way of grace is not opposed to it; but that which is required by *essential* justice is.

This representation of things cannot in any wise depreciate the *merit* of Christ: for be this what it may, it is not *ours*, and cannot therefore constitute any *claim on our behalf, but in virtue of God's free promises*, which being made in grace, continue such in all their fulfilments.

It is enough if the justification of sinners be *consistent with* justice, and this renders the whole in harmony with grace. Such was the value of Christ's blood-shedding, as in regard of its effects on the divine government to be equivalent to our being everlastingly punished, and such the merit of his obedience, as to be worthy of all that God has bestowed on us in reward of it: yet as there is no transfer but of the *effects*, it does not in the least interfere with grace.

If the principles on which the doctrine of atonement proceeds be carefully considered, they will be found not only consistent with grace, but will rank amongst the strongest evidences in favour of it.

In proof of this, let the following observations be duly considered.

First, *It is common among men in shewing kindness to the unworthy, to do it out of regard to one that is worthy, which kindness is nevertheless considered as a matter of free favour.* You had a friend whom you loved as your own soul. He died, and left an only son. The son proves a dissolute, worthless character, and reduces himself to beggary. Still he is the son of your friend, and you wish to shew him kindness. If your kindness be unaccompanied with an explanation of your motives, he may think you have no dislike to his vices. 'Young man,' say you therefore, 'I am sorry it is not in my power to be your friend from a respect to your own character: but I knew and loved your father, and what I do for you is *for his sake!*' Here is an exercise of both justice and grace; justice to the memory of the worthy, and grace in the relief of the unworthy. The worthiness of the father is imputed to the son, inasmuch as in consequence of it he is treated as though he were himself worthy; but it makes no difference as to his real character or deserts, nor in any wise renders what is done to him less a matter of grace than if it had not been done in consideration of his father's worthiness.—If

Onesimus was forgiven by Philemon at the intercession of Paul, (as there is no reason to doubt that he was,) he would not think of its being less an act of grace on that account.

Secondly, *God in his dealings with mankind has frequently proceeded upon the same principle, bestowing blessings on the unworthy out of respect to one that was worthy; which blessings nevertheless have been of pure grace.* God promised the posterity of Noah exemption from a future flood: but knowing that they would utterly corrupt themselves, his covenant was primarily made with *him*.* It was thus in the blessings promised to the posterity of Abraham. The Lord knowing that they would be very corrupt, spake thus to Abraham himself: "As for me, behold my covenant is *with thee*, and thou shalt be a father of many nations."† Hence in a great number of instances wherein mercy was shewn to the rebellious Israelites, they were reminded that it was *not for their sakes*, but on account of the covenant made with their father Abraham, and renewed with Isaac and Jacob.‡ Thus also in the covenant made with David, God blessed his posterity for his sake, saying, "My covenant shall stand fast

* Gen. vi. 18. † Gen. xvii. 4. ‡ Lev. xxvi. 42.

with him."* And when the heart of Solomon was turned away from the Lord God of Israel, he was told that if the Lord did not rend the kingdom utterly from him, it would not be for his sake, but for David his servant's sake, and for Jerusalem's sake which he had chosen.† In these instances there was a display of both justice and grace, and the righteousness of the fathers was as I may say, imputed to the children, inasmuch as in consequence of it they were treated as if they themselves were righteous; but it makes no difference as to their deserts, nor in any wise renders what was done to them less a matter of grace than if it had proceeded merely from the divine goodness, and without any consideration of the righteousness of their fathers. So far from this, the very language, "Not for your sakes do I this, be it known to you, but for my great name's sake, and for the covenant that I made with your fathers," would tend more than any thing to humble them, and to impress them with the idea that what they had was altogether of grace.

If it be objected, that in these cases, though the blessing was of grace to the party receiving it, yet it was in reward of the party for whose sake it was given—I answer, It is in respect of

* Psa. lxxxix. 28. † 1 Kings, xi. 11—13, 32, 34.

the party receiving, and him only, that it is called grace; and this is sufficient for its being so denominated. It is of what justification is *to us*, and not what it is *to Christ* that the Apostle speaks. It is enough if it be of grace to us, and if God's bestowing it upon us out of respect to the worthiness of his Son, does not diminish that grace, but on the contrary augments it.

But it may be said that in these cases there was no example of the innocent suffering for the guilty; no atonement; no redemption of the parties by a sacrifice offered in their stead. We therefore proceed to observe,

Thirdly, *God in the appointment of animal sacrifices, (though they were only shadows of good things to come,) sanctified the principle of sin being expiated by the sufferings of a substitute, and yet represented the sinner as* FREELY FORGIVEN.—The process of the burnt-offering is thus described: "If his offering be a burnt-sacrifice of the herd, let him offer a male without blemish: he shall offer it of his own voluntary will, (or as Ainsworth renders it, *for acceptance*,) at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation before the Lord. And he shall put his hand upon the head of the burnt-offering, and it shall be accepted for him, to make

atonement for him, &c.* The current language concerning these sacrifices is, "And the priest shall make atonement for him as concerning his sin that he hath committed, *and it shall be forgiven him.*"† In all these transactions there was *justice* and *grace;* justice in requiring a sacrifice, and grace in forgiving the transgressor. There was also *imputation:* the sin of the party was imputed to the appointed victim, which was reckoned as though it were the sinner, and treated as such in the divine administration. The atonement made by the sacrifice was on the other hand imputed to him that offered it; that is, it was reckoned to his account, and he was treated accordingly. This is clear from what is said of one the flesh of whose offering was neglected to be eaten before the third day according to appointment: "It shall not be *accepted,* neither shall it be *imputed* unto him that offereth it: it is an abomination, and the soul that eateth of it shall bear his iniquity,"‡ implying that if offered according to the divine appointment, it was accepted for him, and imputed to him, and he should not bear his iniquity.

In all these substitutional sacrifices, atonement did not operate to the diminution of grace; they were not such a payment of the sinner's debt as

* Lev. i. 3, 4. † Lev. iv. 20, 26, 31, 35, &c. ‡ Lev. vii. 18.

that he should be entitled to deliverance as a matter of claim, since the issue of all was, "And his sins shall be FORGIVEN him." On the contrary, every thing was calculated to magnify the grace of God, and to humble the sinner in the dust before him. Of this tendency particularly, was his having to lay his hand upon the head of the sacrifice, confessing his sin, and acknowledging in effect that if he had been treated according to his deserts, he himself must have been the victim.

The doctrine of sacrifices receives an interesting illustration from the case of Job and his three friends. "And it was so that after the Lord had spoken these words unto Job, the Lord said to Eliphaz the Temanite, My wrath is kindled against thee and against thy two friends: for ye have not spoken of me the thing that is right as my servant Job hath. Therefore take unto you now seven bullocks, and seven rams, and go to my servant Job, and offer up for yourselves a burnt-offering, and my servant Job shall pray for you, for him will I accept: lest I deal with you after your folly."* We see here that the three friends could not be justified on the ground of their own conduct. They must either be accepted

* Job. xlii. 7.

through a sacrifice and intercessor, or be dealt with according to their folly. And this sacrifice and intercession, instead of making void the grace of the transaction, goes to establish it. It must have been not a little humiliating to Eliphaz and his companions to be given to understand that all their zeal for God had been folly, and required an atonement; that the Lord would not receive a petition at their hands; that the sacrifices must be brought to Job, and offered up in his presence; and that after all their contumelious language to him, they must owe their acceptance to his intercession. Had they been forgiven without this process, their sin must have appeared light, and the grace of God in its forgiveness, have been diminished in their apprehension, in comparison of what it was.

Fourthly, *The New Testament, while it represents the interposition of Christ as necessary for the consistent exercise of mercy, ascribes the whole of our salvation nevertheless to the free grace of God.*—I need not prove this position by a number of references. The doctrine of the New Testament on this subject is summarily comprehended in the verses following the text, and which contain the Apostle's explanation of his own words. Having stated that we are "justified *freely by grace*

through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, he adds, "Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; to declare, I say, at this time, his righteousness: that he might be just and the justifier of him who believeth in Jesus."

Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation— We see here in what "the redemption of Christ," by which we are justified, consisted. He himself was made an expiatory sacrifice, through which God might be propitious to sinners without any dishonour attaching to his character.

Through faith in his blood—In order to an Israelite being benefited by the appointed sacrifices, it was necessary for him, or for the priest on his behalf, to put his hands upon the head of the animal, and there to make confession of sins. Hence the offerers of sacrifices are denominated *the comers thereunto.** And thus it is necessary to our deriving benefit from the propitiation of Christ that we should believe in him.

To declare his righteousness for the remission of sins—The first thing necessary in our justification

* Heb. x. 1.

is the remission of sin. The grand impediment to this was, that it would reflect upon the *righteousness* of God; representing either his precepts and threatenings as too rigid to be put in execution, or his mercy as being mere connivance. Hence when a great act of mercy was to be shewn, it became necessary to preface it by a declaration or demonstration of righteousness. God by making his beloved Son a sacrifice, practically declared or demonstrated, in the presence of the universe, his determination to maintain the honour of his government, and his utter abhorrence of sin. Having done this, he can now forgive the believing sinner, without any suspicion of connivance attaching to his character.

Sins that are past, through the forbearance of God—The propitiation of Christ was not only necessary in behalf of believers under the times of the gospel, but of those in former ages. Those who had offered sacrifices were not forgiven in virtue of them, but of this. On the ground of Christ's undertaking to become a propitiation in the fulness of time, the *forbearance* of God was exercised towards them. And now that his righteousness is declared, he can be *just and the justifier of him who believeth in Jesus.*

Supposing the foregoing comments to be the substance of the Apostle's meaning, what is there in any part of it which renders void, or in any wise diminishes, the free grace of God? Does the declaration or demonstration of his righteousness *for the remission of sins* render it no remission? Would it have been more of a favour for God to have pardoned sin without any regard to righteousness than with it? Is there any thing in the whole proceeding that puts the sinner in possession of a claim on the ground of essential justice, or which warrants him to hope for an interest in its blessed results without coming to the Saviour as guilty and unworthy?

There is nothing in the New Testament which represents the death of Christ as superseding the necessity of repentance, confession, and humble supplication, or as investing the believer with any other claim of spiritual blessings than that which arises from the free promise of God, through his dear Son. We never read there of "suing out our right;" nor of mercy being a matter of demand, since Christ has paid the debt. All is in the language of supplication in the name of Christ.

The *intercession of Christ* himself on our behalf proceeds upon the same principle. It would

not otherwise be *intercession*. "Grace, (as Dr. Goodwin observes,) requires to be applied for in a way of *intreaty* and *intercession*."*

Those who plead for the intercession of Christ in a way of *authority*, or *demand*, ground it on his sacrifice and merits, which being of infinite worth, must, they suppose, entitle him to ask favours for his people in this manner. That God in love to his dear Son should reward his voluntary obedience unto death with the bestowment of eternal salvation on them that believe in him, and even

* The words of our Lord in John xvii. 24. "Father *I will*, &c." have been thought to convey a different idea.

"With cries and tears he offered up
His humble suit below;
But with *authority* he asks,
Enthron'd in glory now.

For all that come to God by him,
Salvation he *demands;*
Points to their names upon his breast,
And spreads his wounded hands."

Toplady.

This petition, however, was offered up when our Lord was upon earth; and his intercession in heaven is called *prayer*. "I will *pray* the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter." "The verb rendered *will*, (says Dr. Campbell,) is the same which in Matthew xii. 38, and Mark x. 35, is rendered *would*, and ought to have been so rendered here, as it implies request, not command."

lay himself under *obligation* to do so, is perfectly consistent with its being of grace; but obligation of this kind furnishes no ground for *demand*, nor does it appear from the scriptures that the Majesty of heaven and earth was ever so approached. In the gospel way of salvation, grace and justice "meet," or are *combined* in the same thing. Grace, through the righteousness of Jesus, "reigns," not in one or two stages, but in every stage, "unto eternal life:" but on the principle of salvation being an object of demand, it must in some stages of it become a matter of mere justice, it might be grace to provide the deliverer, but there would be none in the deliverance itself.

However worthy Christ was to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing: yet when pleading for *sinners*, it required to be in the language of *intercession*. His worthiness is that indeed on account of which we are treated *as if we were* worthy, but it does not render us meritorious. The righteousness of Christ is imputed to us, but it is only in its *effects* that it is transferred, or indeed transferable. The sum is, there is nothing in the atonement or justifying righteousness of Christ that in any wise supersedes the necessity of our being freely forgiven, or freely blessed.

I conclude with a few reflections on the whole subject.

First, If the doctrine here stated and defended be true, there is something in *the nature of sin* much more offensive to God, than is generally supposed. Is it conceivable that God, whose nature is love, would have *cursed* the work of his hands for a matter of small account? He does not delight in cursing: he afflicts not willingly, nor grieves the children of men. Yet every transgressor of his law is declared to be accursed.* All the curses in the book of God stand against him: in his basket, and in his store; in the city, and in the field; in his going out, and in his coming in; and in all that he setteth his hand unto. Nor is it confined to the present life, but includes "everlasting punishment." Is it conceivable that God would have made his Son a sacrifice, or that the Lord of glory would have come into the world for this purpose, if sin had not been an evil and a bitter thing? If it were no more than men in general conceive it to be, assuredly so much would not have been made of it. It is upon light thoughts of sin that a disbelief of justification through the blood-shedding of Christ is grafted: but let us think as lightly as we may of it, if God thinks

* Gal. iii. 10.

otherwise, we shall be in the wrong, for the judgment of God is according to truth.

Secondly, If this doctrine be true, the danger of our being lost arises not from the magnitude of our sin, be it what it may, but from a *self-righteous rejection of the only way of acceptance with God.* Let the nature or degrees of sin be what they may, there is no reason on that account to despair of salvation. On the contrary, there is the utmost encouragement for the most guilty and unworthy to return to God by Jesus Christ. Every bar in the way of acceptance which respected the government of God is removed. God can be just, and yet the justifier of the believer in Jesus. More glory redounds to him, even to his justice, from salvation than from damnation. Nor is there any cause to doubt the willingness of God to shew mercy. He is indeed unwilling to shew mercy to them who seek it in any other way than Christ, or rather is determined they shall not find it; but every one that seeketh in his name findeth. There is one great and overwhelming fact that answers all objections—"He that spared not his own Son, but freely delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also give us all things freely?" The pardon of sin, and acceptance with God are blessings of such magnitude that nothing in this

world is to be compared with them: yet these are less than what has been given already; for the argument of the Apostle is from the greater to the less. If we be willing to receive Christ, and with him all things freely, there is nothing to hinder it. If the door of mercy be shut upon us it is a *self-righteous spirit* that shuts it. Look at a self-justifying spirit in respect of faults committed between man and man. Persons of very ordinary capacity in other things will here be ingenious to admiration in framing excuses. They who seem scarcely able to speak on other subjects will be quite eloquent in defending themselves; dwelling on circumstances that make in their favour, keeping what makes against them out of sight, alleging their good intentions even in things which in themselves cannot be justified, and shunning, as one would shun the road to death, a frank acknowledgment of their sin, and a humble petition for mercy. Of the same nature is a self-righteous spirit in respect of sin committed against God; and this it is that shuts the door of mercy. If a convict under a just sentence of death be assured from authority that if he confess his guilt, and petition for mercy, he will be forgiven; and if instead of making such confession and supplication, he either pleads

not guilty, or at least insists upon his *comparative* innocence, or upon some circumstances which may *entitle* him to mercy, should we not say of such a man, He shuts the door of mercy on himself? He dies not on account of the magnitude of his crime, but of his pride and obstinacy. His original crime is still indeed the formal cause of his punishment; but it is owing to his self-justifying spirit that it was finally laid to his charge. And thus it is that the scriptures ascribe the loss of the soul to unbelief. "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life; and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life, but *the wrath of God abideth on him*—Israel which followed after the law of righteousness, hath not attained to the law of righteousness. Wherefore? Because they sought it not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law; for they stumbled at that stumbling stone."*

It is remarkable that in drawing a conclusion from the doctrine of absolute sovereignty, in which the Apostle had taught that God "had mercy on whom he would have mercy," he ascribes the failure of the Jews, not to their non-election, but to their unbelief.

* John iii. 36. Rom. ix. 31, 32.

Finally, Though justification be of "grace, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus," yet without good works we can give no proof of our being justified. The whole argument of the Apostle in the sixth chapter of this epistle teaches that believers cannot live in sin, being dead to it, and alive to God.—Those who are in Christ Jesus, to whom there is now no condemnation, are said to *walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.* We need not wish for stronger evidence in favour of the doctrine of free justification than that which is furnished by the objections which are answered by the Apostle. No other notion of justification than that which is of grace through Christ would admit of such objections as he encounters: no other doctrine therefore can justly pretend to be apostolical.

It follows, however, that while we contend for the doctrine, it concerns us so to walk as not to furnish its adversaries with a handle for reproaching it as unfriendly to a life of holiness. The law of God though not the medium of life, is nevertheless the rule of conduct: and though we are justified by faith alone, yet good works are necessary to prove it to be genuine. Thus it is that faith is

"shewn," and "made perfect" by works. All who profess to believe the doctrine do not live under its influence, and they who do, are exposed to other influences. Whatever peace of mind, therefore, it may be adapted to produce, it furnishes no ground for carnal or presumptuous security.

SERMON X.

EPHESIANS ii. 13.

"But now in Christ Jesus, ye who sometimes were far off, are made nigh by the blood of Christ."

IT is common to speak of our country in respect of its high state of civilization and cultivation, as a garden. But to know what civilization and cultivation have done for us we must know what we were in former ages, when the island was little better than a wilderness, and its inhabitants a race of barbarians.

Thus if we would understand what Christianity hath done for us we must acquaint ourselves with the condition we were in, while subject to pagan darkness and superstition. It is thus that

the Apostle, in writing to the Ephesians, teaches them the value of the blessings and privileges of the gospel, by directing their attention to the state that they were in before it reached them.

At the beginning of the chapter they are reminded of their state as sinners *in common with other sinners.* "And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins; wherein in times past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience. Among whom also we all (Jews as well as Gentiles) had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath even as others." v. 1—3. But in addition to this, the Apostle reminds them of their *peculiar condition as heathens.* "Remember that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh—that at that time ye were without Christ, (being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise,) having no hope, and without God in the world." This being in some respects the greatest remove from God in which men could place themselves, they are emphatically said to have been *far off.* Sinners among the

Jews were subjectively distant from God; but they were so both subjectively and objectively, as being destitute of the most important means of knowing him.

In discoursing upon the subject we shall first observe that state of distance which is peculiar to heathens—Secondly, that which is common to heathens and all other sinners—and thirdly, the way in which they are recovered, and brought nigh.

I. LET US OBSERVE THAT STATE OF DISTANCE WHICH IS PECULIAR TO HEATHENS.—This is far from being an uninteresting subject to us. At the time of this epistle being written, our fathers were in this very state; and had not the gospel been brought to us by those who had heard and believed it, we had been in the same state at this day. Instead of being met together as we now are, to worship the living God through the mediation of his Son, we had been assembled to adore stocks and stones; instead of singing the high praises of Jehovah, nothing had been heard in our cities, towns, and villages, but the vociferations of idolatry; instead of the gratifying sights arising from the institutions of humanity and benevolence, we should have been witnesses,

and perhaps more than witnesses, of the offering up of human sacrifices!

The description given of this state by the Apostle, in verses 11, 12, is very affecting. "At that time ye were *without Christ*—The only way in which Christ could be known, was by revelation; and the only people to whom a revelation was made was *Israel*. To them pertained the oracles of God and the covenants of promise. Being therefore aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, they must needs be strangers from the covenants of promise, and so of course be without Christ. And being without Christ, they had *no hope*, either of their sins being forgiven, or of a blessed hereafter. And though they daily partook of the bounties of providence; yet being without Christ, and without hope, they were without God in the world!

Such was the state of the heathen world at the coming of Christ. The science of Egypt, Chaldea, Greece, and Rome, had discovered much as to things pertaining to the present life; but in respect of an hereafter, all was enveloped in gross darkness. The far greater part did not think of it, and they that did, knew but just enough to make them miserable. They were aware

that, like all others, they must die; and knowing that they had not lived and acted even to each other as they ought, their consciences forboded a state in which they would be called to account: but what it would be, they knew not.

"The following lines might be written by a pensive infidel of modern times; but they would have fitted the lips of a pagan.

> "Distrust and darkness of a future state,
> Makes poor mankind so fearful of his fate;
> Death of itself is nothing; but we fear
> To be we know not what, we know not where."

Such, or nearly such, must have been the reflections of the most serious among the heathen; and as to the rest, they were buried in all manner of wickedness. It is of the nature of idolatry to efface and obliterate from the mind all just thoughts of God and true religion, and to substitute in their place vain imaginations and vile affections. Instead of a holy, just, and good being presiding over the universe, imaginary deities are set up, whose office it is to preside over particular countries and concerns, and this in a manner suited to the inclinations of their worshippers, entering into all their prejudices, and patronizing their most favourite vices.

There is a marked connexion between impiety and obscenity, or the casting off of the knowledge and worship of God, and a being given up to the basest practices towards one another.* God is jealous, and the Lord avengeth! If they dishonour him by transferring his glory to an idol, he will give them up in turn to dishonour their own bodies. If they change the truth of God the Creator, who is blessed for ever, into the practical lie of worshipping that as God which is not God, for this cause they shall be given up to vile affections. As they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a mind void of judgment, and to the practice of every thing obscene, unnatural, unjust, malignant, false, and cruel; not only to wallow like filthy beasts in the mire, but to prefer the society of such as their friends and companions! If any doubt whether this picture be not overcharged, let faithful witnesses be heard, and they will report the same things of heathen countries at this day.

We hear from men, calling themselves Christians, but who in fact are infidels, flattering accounts of heathen virtue, and laboured attempts to prove the virtuous tendency of the system

* See Rom. i. 21—26.

Idols, instead of being competitors with the true God, are represented as connected with him; as though it were a matter of indifference to whom the worship is presented, "Jehovah, Jove, or Baal;" all is received as a tribute paid to the common Father of all. Such are the sentiments taught by one of our poets; and such are the principles of so large a part of our countrymen, that if Britons do not christianize India, India may be expected soon to heathenize Britain! Shall we, in complaisance to infidels, throw away our bibles, and listen to their pleas for the most sottish stupidity that ever disgraced human nature? The voice of reason, and thank God, the voice of Britain, answer, No! We ourselves were sometimes darkness; but if we have been made light in the Lord, let us walk as children of the light. We proceed,

II. To observe THAT STATE OF DISTANCE WHICH IS COMMON TO HEATHENS AND ALL OTHER SINNERS.—We have seen already that there is a state described at the beginning of the chapter which refers not to what the Ephesians were by education, by custom, or by any other circumstances attending their former life, but to what they were *by nature*. It was in respect of this that the

apostle reckoned himself and his countrymen, notwithstanding their living under the light of revelation, with them; and in this respect, we also, notwithstanding our living under the light of the gospel, must be reckoned with them—"Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others."

The Apostle does not tell the Ephesians from whom, or from what they were "far off;" the reason of which might be that there was no one word that would convey the fulness of the sentiment. He might have said, Ye were far off from happiness; this had been true—or far off from peace; this had been true—or far off from righteousness; this had been true—or far off from hope; this also had been true: he might mean to comprehend them all, and therefore made use of general terms. If any word had been used more comprehensive than the rest, it must have been, far off from GOD. This is the last term in the preceding description, to which the words "far off" refer—without Christ, having no hope; and *without* GOD *in the world!*

There is a natural distance from God which necessarily belongs to us and to the loftiest archangel, as creatures. But this distance is not removed by "the blood of Christ." The enjoyments of heaven itself will not remove or diminish it. It is not of this, therefore, that the Apostle writes; but of that moral distance from God which belongs to us as sinners. There is nothing sinful in being far off from God in the first sense; but to be far off in our thoughts of him, affections towards him, and desires after him, is of the essence of sin. This is alienation of heart, which stamps the character: for what a man's heart is, that is he. If a subject be so full of disaffection to his rightful prince, that he has no feeling of respect towards him, no mind to please him, nor to think, or read, or hear any thing in his praise, this were alienation of heart: and if all this were without cause, we should say of such a man, that he did not deserve to live under a government to which he was so wickedly disaffected. Yet this is the state of mind of sinners towards the blessed God. They call not upon his name; but rise in the morning, and retire at evening, as if there was no God, and no hereafter; as if they had no soul to be saved or lost; but like the animals that surround them, were made to eat, drink, and sleep, for a few years,

and then to die, and be no more! The things of God do not occupy their minds; and, unless they conceive of his character as very different from what the scriptures represent it, they do not like to think of him, nor to speak of him, nor to hear others speak of him, or of any thing pertaining to him as revealed in the bible. The serious mention of his name strikes a damp upon their spirits, and often puts an end to a conversation. They have no delight in reading his word, and never make it their study to do any thing because he requires it. What is all this but practically saying to God, "Depart from us: for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways."

We have not to go into the heathen world in search of such characters as these: they are found in all our cities, towns, villages and congregations, and in almost all our families. We may call ourselves Christians, and yet be without Christ; and declaim against atheism, yet live without God in the world.

But though all sinners are far off from God, yet some are farther off than others. Every sinner has gone so far from God that he will never return of his own accord. The ways of sin are our *own ways*; we find them without any

difficulty, but never return till the good Shepherd finds us and brings us home. But some are farther off than others. As sin obtains in different degrees, so does the distance at which it places us from God. The scriptures represent some persons as in a more hopeless state than others; and the same person is farther off at one period of life than at another. Sin being progressive, the longer any one lives in it without repentance, the farther off he necessarily is from God. Every sinner "going on still in his trespasses," is getting more and more hardened, and farther from the hearing of the calls of conscience and of God.

Shall I mention a few cases of persons whom the scriptures represent as farthest from God? You may expect me to name the *profligate*, who is at open war with God; who breaks the Sabbath, wallows in intemperance and debauchery, and laughs at all serious religion. And true it is that such characters are at an awful distance from God: yet many who have been thus far off, have been made nigh by the blood of Christ. Such were some of the Corinthians, and such have been some of us.

There is a case more hopeless than this, namely, that of *the self-righteous*. Of the Pharisees who

were *righteous in their own eyes and despised others*, it is said, that "publicans and harlots entered into the kingdom of heaven before them." When some of them came to John, he called them "a generation of vipers," and asked with surprise, "Who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?" Our Lord asked them, "How can ye escape the damnation of hell?" as though they were so fast bound by the chains of spiritual pride, as to render their deliverance next to impossible. Reprove a drunkard or a debauchee, and you will have his conscience on your side. Converse with him seriously on temperance, righteousness, and judgment to come, and he will tremble. But he that is pure in his own eyes, and yet not cleansed from his filthiness, his very "mind and conscience is defiled." Thinking highly of himself and of his doings, he will resent every thing said to him which calls in question the goodness of his state. He flatters himself that he is at peace with God, and does not chuse to be disturbed in his repose. Talk to him of Christ Jesus having come into the world to save *sinners*, even the chief of sinners, and it will either appear to him a strange doctrine, or, if he comprehend your design, it is likely he will feel himself insulted. He saith in his heart, 'Am I, after all the pains that I have taken, to be

placed on a footing with the worst of characters? If so, where is the justice of God? Thus the gospel seems a hard saying, and he cannot hear it. A sinner in such a state of mind is farther from God, and more hopeless, than the profligate whom he despises.—"The Gentile, who followed not after righteousness, attained to righteousness, even the righteousness which is of faith: but Israel, who followed after the law of righteousness, hath not attained to the law of righteousness. Wherefore? Because they sought it not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law; for they stumbled at that stumbling stone."* Yet even from this distance some have been made nigh by the blood of Christ. Of this the Apostle himself was an example, as were also the "great company of the priests who were obedient to the faith."†

But there is another case which may be reckoned still more hopeless, and the party still farther off from God. This is, where a person has sat under the preaching of the gospel for a number of years, but still living in his sins, he at length becomes *past feeling*. Such characters, I fear, are not very uncommon in our congregations. Should there be one such present at this

* Rom. ix. 30—32. † Acts vi. 7.

time, let me reason with him. Thirty or forty years ago it may be you heard the gospel, and felt, and wept under it. Some of your fellow-worshippers observing the tears which fell from your eyes, conceived a hope that the heart of stone was taken away, and a heart of flesh imparted. But these convictions wore off; and by degrees the most pungent things might be delivered in your hearing without leaving any impression on your mind. The case was this—Under your convictions you desisted from your evil courses; but as the former subsided, you returned to the latter. At first you indulged in lesser sins, then in greater, till at length your whole study was, not how you should avoid sin; but how you should indulge in it, and yet conceal it: and it may be you have succeeded in both to a great degree; living in uncleanness, or drunkenness, or in some other sin, and yet concealing it from the world, and filling up your place in the house of God. And now you can hear the most awful threatenings, and the most melting expostulations, unmoved. Your heart is become callous and insensible. Conscience itself is seared as with a hot iron. In a word, you are *past feeling*. Many have perished in this state, and many doubtless will perish: yet even from this

state of distance some have been made nigh by the blood of Christ. "If from *thence* thou shalt seek the Lord thy God, thou shalt find him, if thou seek him with all thy heart and with all thy soul,—for the Lord our God is a merciful God."*

Thus far we have considered the distance of sinners from God, merely in respect of their alienation of heart from him; but we must not confine it to this: as men have wickedly departed from God, God has righteously withdrawn from them, and thus the distance being mutual is increased. While man continued obedient, his Creator admitted him to near communion with him, as is intimated by his "walking in the garden in the cool of the day;" but when he transgressed his commandment, he withdrew his favour, thrust him out of Paradise, and placed a guard about the tree of life, rendering it inaccessible.

Had there been no provision of mercy through the promised seed, there could have been no more communion between God and man, any more than between God and the fallen angels. Men might have dragged out a guilty and miserable

* Deut. iv. 29-31.

existence in the world;* but they must have lived and died under the curse. Whatever had been bestowed upon them it would have been in wrath, in like manner as riches are given some men to their hurt. Whatever had been their troubles, they would have had no God to repair to under them, and whatever their prospects, the hope of

* Some have thought that the death threatened in Gen. ii. 17, was merely corporeal, and that if it had been executed, man would have been immediately struck out of existence. But the death here threatened, whatever it was, "passed upon all men," which implies the existence of all men, and which would have been prevented if Adam had, at that time, been reduced to a state of non-existence, or had even been banished from this world. The original constitution of things must, therefore, have provided for the existence of every individual that has since been born into the world, and this whether man should stand or fall. The death here threatened, doubtless included that of the body, and which God might execute at pleasure: the day he should eat he would be dead in law; but it also included the loss of the divine favour, and an exposedness to his wrath. If it were not so, the redemption of Christ would not be properly opposed to it, which it frequently is. Rom. v. 12—21. It must be to this sentence that the apostle refers in Heb. ix. 27. "It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment," or Christ's being "once offered to bear the sins of many," and his "coming a second time without sin into salvation" would not have been introduced as antidotes to the evils: but if the sentence included both *death and judgment*, it must be more than corporeal death.

a blessed hereafter would have made no part of them.

This awful state of distance from God is *still* the condition of the unbelieving and the ungodly. The interposition of Christ avails not in behalf of them. "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him."* Being without Christ, they are without hope, and without God in the world. Every thing they do is evil; every thing they possess is cursed; and every hour they live in that state of mind adds to their guilt and misery. As "all things work together for good, to them that love God," so all things work together for evil to them that love him not. Under all their calamities and troubles they have no God on whom to cast their cares, and in death have nothing but a fearful looking for of judgment. The very messengers of mercy are charged on their peril to "say to the wicked it shall be ill with him."

How tremendously awful then is the condition of the unbelieving and the ungodly! There is one way of escape, and but one! and is it possible that this can be disregarded; and that men can

* John iii. 36.

live easy and unconcerned with the curse of God over their heads? Surely this must be owing to a disbelief of the divine *threatenings* as well as of the doctrine of the gospel. But take heed, "lest there be among you a root that beareth gall and wormwood; and it come to pass when he heareth the words of this curse, that he bless himself in his heart, saying, I shall have peace though I walk in the imagination of mine heart, to add drunkenness to thirst: the Lord will not spare him, but then the anger of the Lord and his jealousy shall smoke against that man, and all the curses that are written in this book shall lie upon him, and the Lord shall blot out his name from under heaven!"* In this terrible condition the gospel finds us. To this door of hope we shall now direct your attention, by considering,

III. THE WAY IN WHICH SINNERS ARE RECOVERED AND BROUGHT NIGH TO GOD—It is "in Christ Jesus;" and "by the blood of Christ."—In Christ we possess all. It is as being "in Christ Jesus that we possess all spiritual blessings; and by the shedding of his blood they were obtained.

The blood of Christ may be considered in three views—as shed upon the cross, as pro-

* Deut. xxix. 18—20.

claimed by the preaching of the gospel, and as believed in for salvation by the perishing sinner; these being united, bring near those who were once far off.

First, *By the blood of Christ as shed upon the cross, atonement was made, sin was expiated, and a way opened for God to draw near to the sinner, and the sinner to God.*—In punishing transgressors displeasure is expressed against transgression. In substitutionary sacrifices displeasure was expressed against transgression, but withal mercy to the transgressor; the first as signifying that thus the offerer deserved to have been treated; the last as accepting a substitute in his stead. In the sacrifice of Christ, both these sentiments were expressed in the highest degree. "God sent his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, (or by a sacrifice for sin) CONDEMNED sin in the flesh."—He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things.* In proportion as God's own Son was dear to him, and, as possessed of divine dignity, estimable by him, such were the hatred of sin and the love to sinners manifested in smiting him.

* Rom. viii. 3, 32.

If mercy had been exercised to man without such an expression of displeasure against their sin, it must have appeared to the creation to be connivance, and the character of God must have sunk in their estimation. He must have appeared to be very strict indeed in his precepts, and severe in his threatenings; but as lax in enforcing them as though he had known from the beginning that they would not bear to be acted upon. The fallen angels in particular, must have felt that it could not be *justice* that consigned them to hopeless perdition; for justice is impartial. If the Creator could connive at sin in one instance, he could in another. Thus the bands of moral government had been broken, and the cords which held creation together cast away.

But by the atonement of Christ, a way is opened for the consistent exercise of mercy. There was a kind of atonement made by the vengeance taken on the old world, and that on the Benjamites, as recorded in the last chapters of Judges. Each of these events served to express the divine displeasure against sin, and each made way for the exercise of mercy; the one toward Noah and his posterity, and the other toward the remnant that had taken refuge in the rock Rimmon. Thus in the death of Christ,

though he died "the just for the unjust," yet God herein expressed his displeasure against sin, and having done this, could be just, and the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus. There is now no bar in respect of the government of God, why any sinner should not, on returning to him in the name of his Son, find mercy. On this ground sinners without distinction are actually invited to come unto him and be saved. The only bar that remains is, a spirit of pride and unbelief. If they can believe in Jesus, receiving salvation as God's free gift through him, all things are possible to him that believeth.

When, on visiting a dying man, I hear him talk of having 'made his peace with God,' I tremble for him. If our peace be made with God, it is by the blood of the cross.* What are our confessions, or prayers, or tears? Can they heal the awful breach? If so, God would have spared his own Son, and not have delivered him up to be made a sacrifice. It had then been possible for the cup to pass from him, and it would no doubt have passed from him. If without the shedding of blood there be no remission; and if it were impossible for the blood of bulls and of goats to take away sin, the consequence is, that either

* Col. i. 20.

Christ must be the sacrifice, or we must die in our sins and perish. *He* hath made peace by the blood of his cross; it is not for us to assume to be peace-makers, but to accept of his mediation.

Secondly, *The blood of Christ as proclaimed in the preaching of the gospel, is the appointed mean of bringing sinners near to God.*—It is the doctrine of salvation through the blood of Christ, that is by way of eminency called *the gospel.* It was this doctrine that Christ commissioned his disciples to preach to every creature. "Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: and that repentance and remission of sins *should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem!** This doctrine is *good news* to every creature, and that whether it be received or rejected. It is good news that a way is opened by the death of Christ for any sinner to return to God, and be saved; and that if any sinner walk therein he shall be saved. It is the ministry of reconciliation in which the servants of Christ, as though God did beseech by them, pray men in Christ's stead, saying, Be ye reconciled to God. Its being made light of by the

* Luke xxiv. 46, 47.

greater part of men does not alter its nature; and this they shall know another day. God brings *near* his righteousness, even to them that are stout-hearted, and far from righteousness. Into whatsoever city ye enter, said our Lord, and they receive you, eat such things as are set before you: and heal the sick that are therein, and say unto them THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS COME NIGH UNTO YOU. But into whatsoever city ye enter, and they receive you not, go your ways out into the streets of the same, and say, Even the very dust of your city which cleaveth on us we do wipe off against you: notwithstanding, be ye sure of this, that THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS COME NIGH UNTO YOU. But I say unto you, That it shall be more tolerable in that day for Sodom than for that city."*

Thirdly, *By the doctrine of salvation through the blood of Christ we are actually brought nigh.*—As the prodigal was brought home to his father's house and family, so we are brought home to God. It is thus that we become actually reconciled to God. "If when we were enemies, saith the Apostle, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more being reconciled we shall be saved by his life."† The term *re-*

* Luke x. 8—12. † Rom. v. 10.

conciled is here manifestly used in different senses. In the first instance it refers to the making of atonement; in the last to our believing acquiescence in it, or as it is expressed in the following verse, to our "receiving the atonement." It is in this way that our sins are forgiven; that we are justified, or accepted in the Beloved; that we are invested with the privilege of being the sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty; that God is our God and we his people by a new and better covenant; that we have access to him as our heavenly Father, and to all the ordinances and privileges of his house; finally, it is as believing in him that died and rose again, that we live in hope of eternal life.

There is a term used by the Apostle in Ephesians iii. 12, which conveys a very expressive idea, not only of the nearness to which believers are admitted by the faith of Christ, and which is denoted by the term "access," but of their being *introduced* by him, as by one *taking them by the hand*, and presenting them to the King.* We could not be admitted into the divine presence by ourselves; but our Mediator taking us as it were by the hand, presents us to God. It is

* προσαγωγη *Introduction, manuduction, or being led by the hand.*

thus that we are "accepted in the Beloved" on our first believing, and in all our approaches to the throne of grace have access to God.

To conclude—If we have been made nigh, it becomes us not only to be thankful for so great a favour, but to feel a deep and anxious concern for others, who at present are far off. Whether we consider the state of heathens, of Mahometans, or of our own unbelieving countrymen, they have each a claim on our compassion. And if Christ withheld not his blood to bring us nigh, it surely is not for us to withhold any labour or expense in carrying his gracious designs into execution.

SERMON XI.

JOSHUA xxiii. 11.

"*Take good heed therefore unto yourselves, that ye love the Lord your God.*"

IT is an interesting account that we have of the last days of Joshua. He is very anxious that Israel, when he should cease to be their leader, should cleave unto the Lord. To make as deep an impression upon their minds as possible, he first called for the elders and leading men amongst them, and delivered a serious charge to them: after this he gathered all the tribes together before the Lord in Shechem, where he solemnly rehearsed the dealings of the Lord with them, and bound them by every consideration that he could suggest, not to forsake him, and go after

the idols of the heathen. It is in this connexion, that he introduces the words of the text, "Take heed therefore unto yourselves that ye love the Lord your God;" intimating that in order to be obedient to the Lord, and secure against idolatrous departures from him, it was necessary, not merely to own him as their God, but to be cordially attached to his name and government. The word rendered "yourselves" in the text, is in the margin rendered "your souls," denoting that it is not a superficial inspection of the conduct that is meant, but a looking to our inmost motives, seeing to it that we love the Lord from our very hearts.

This is a charge that would well befit the lips of any servant of God before he leaves the world, and be well suited to the conduct of any people. If our hearts are right with God, all is right; if not, all is wrong.

In discoursing upon the subject we shall offer a few remarks on the nature of love, and of love to God in particular—consider the importance of it in giving the character to the whole of our religion—the danger of declining from it—and the means to be used in promoting it

I. LET US OFFER A FEW REMARKS ON THE NATURE OF LOVE, AND OF LOVE TO GOD IN PARTICULAR.—That we may perceive the extent of the precept, it is necessary that we understand a few of the different ways in which love operates.

Observe then, in the first place, that *love operates differently according to the condition of its object.* If directed to one that is miserable, it works in a way of pity and sympathy; if to one that is in necessity, it will impart to his relief; but if to one greatly our superior, as to a kind and benevolent sovereign, for instance, then it will operate in the way of honour, complacency, gratitude, and obedience. I need not say that God is not subject to either misery or want, and therefore that our love to him cannot operate in the way of pity towards him, or by communicating to his necessities. The ways in which love to God operates are those of honour, complacency, gratitude, and obedience.

Secondly, *Love operates differently, according to the condition of the subject of it.*—If no offence has been given or taken between the parties, it is peace and amity; but if otherwise, it will operate in the way of regret, repentance, and a desire

of reconciliation. Man in his original state was admitted to commune with his Creator, and love during his continuance in that state operated in a way of grateful adoration. But if a spark of love be kindled in the breast of a fallen creature, it will work in a way of sorrow for sin, and a desire to return to God as the prodigal did to his father. Moreover, in an innocent creature love to God would operate in a way of delight and praise, but in a fallen creature, under the preaching of the gospel, it will induce him to embrace the way of salvation by Jesus Christ. Hence the want of faith in Christ is alleged in proof of the want of love to God. "I know you that ye have not the love of God in you: I am come in my Father's name and ye receive me not."*

Thirdly, *A complacency in the divine character still enters into the essence of love.*—There may be affections where this is not; but there can be no true love to God. We may be greatly affected by an apprehension that our sins are forgiven us, and this merely from self-love; but such affections will not abide. Many who joined in singing praise to the Lord on their deliverance at the red sea, soon forgot his works—for their hearts were not right with God.† Genuine love

* John v. 42, 43. † Psalms cvi. 12—13. lxxviii. 37.

to God has respect not merely to his benefits, but to his name, nature, or character, as revealed in the scriptures. As he that hateth not sin *as sin*, has no real hatred to it, so he that loveth not God *as God*, has no real love to him. True love to God for the gift of his Son, and salvation through his death, does not merely respect the benefits we receive, but the holy, just, and honourable way in which those benefits are conferred. He that is affected only by the consideration of his own safety, regardless of the way in which it is obtained, cannot be said to love God. Whether God be just or unjust, is to such a person a matter of indifference, so that he justifieth *him*. The love of God will lead us to prize that way of salvation which in making provision for our necessities, secures the divine glory.

II. LET US OBSERVE THE IMPORTANCE OF THIS PRINCIPLE AS CHARACTERIZING THE WHOLE OF OUR RELIGION.—Love is not so much a particular grace as a property pertaining to all the graces. It is that to our graces which the holiness of God is to his moral attributes, pervading and characterizing the whole. Indeed it is holiness itself: if the law be the standard of holiness, that which is the fulfilling of the law, which love

is said to be, must comprehend the whole of it. Observe particularly,

First. *It is the love of God which distinguishes true religion from all counterfeits, and from the effects of merely natural principles.*—It is this that distinguishes repentance from repentance, faith from faith, and fear from fear. Each of these graces has its counterfeit. Wherein consisted the difference between the repentance of Judas, and that of Peter? The one was mere remorse of conscience; the other proceeded from love to him whom he had denied. Wherein consisted the difference between the belief of those rulers, who, because of the pharisees, did not confess the Saviour, lest they should be put out of the synagogue,* and that which was to the saving of the soul? The one was a conviction which forced itself upon them, while their hearts were averse to it; the other was "receiving the love of the truth that they might be saved." And wherein consists the difference between the fear that hath torment, and godly fear? Is it not that the one is void of love, and the other is not so? Perfect love casteth out the former, but promoteth the latter.

* John xii. 42.

So much as we have of the love of God, so much we have of true religion, and no more. The love that we bear to our fellow-christians, to the law, to the gospel, and even to Christ himself, is the love of God. We see in our brethren the image of God, and love it; in the law of God a glorious transcript of his mind, and love it; in the gospel a more glorious transcript of his mind, and love it more; and in the person and work of Christ the very image of the invisible God, and our hearts are united to him. In loving each of these objects we love God.

Secondly, *It is the love of God that keeps every thing in a state of moral order.*—Under its influence every thing will be done in subserviency to his glory, and every thing taken well at his hand. If God be loved first, he will be sought first. We shall not think of excusing ourselves in the neglect of our duty by alleging that we could not find time for it: we commonly find time for things that our hearts are set upon. It is by the love of God that all our actions are directed to his glory. Unbelievers cannot understand how this is. Whether they eat or drink, or whatsoever they do, it is merely for their own gratification, and they cannot conceive of any other end to be answered. Yet it is easy to perceive how

men can make every thing subservient to that which their hearts are set upon, whether it be their interest, or the gratification of their desires. Love to a fellow-creature will render every thing we do subservient to the object. All the labours and journies of a loving head of a family are directed to their comfort, and all the busy cares of an affectionate wife to the honour and happiness of her husband. If then God be the supreme object of our love, whether we eat or drink, or whatsoever we do, we shall do all to his glory.

It is thus that the common concerns of life are converted into religion, and that we shall serve the Lord even in our worldly avocations: "Not slothful in business; fervent in spirit, serving the Lord."* It is in *abusing* the world, by giving it that place in our hearts which belongs to God, that it retards us in our progress to heaven. If instead of this, we could *use* it, it would be useful to us even for another life, furnishing us with matter for daily prayer and praise, and thus assisting us in our progress.

If we love God we shall take every thing well at his hand, and so be reconciled to all his dispensations toward us, whether they be good or

* Rom. xii. 11.

evil. We can bear any thing almost from one whom we love, especially when we know that it is accompanied with wisdom and directed by goodness. When in the day of Israel's calamity, their enemies asked "Where is now their God?" it was sufficient to answer, "Our God is in the heavens; he hath done whatsoever he pleased."* It was love that dictated those memorable sayings of Job during the early stages of his trials, "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord! Shall we receive good at the hand of the Lord, and shall we not receive evil?" It was this that reconciled David when driven from his throne by the rebellion of his own son.—"Here I am: let him do with me as seemeth good to him." And when cursed by an enemy, viewing it as the Lord's hand stretched out against him, he submitted.—"The Lord hath said unto him, Curse David!"

Thirdly, *It is the love of God that is the great preservative from error.* If indeed the truth of God were a matter of mere speculation, and we might take for granted the sincerity and impartiality of our inquiries, error would then be innocent, and the love of God would be no more of a preservative from it than it is from a mistake

* Psalm cxv. 2. 3.

in the casting up of a sum in arithmetic. But if divine truth be of a practical nature, and be so clearly revealed that no unprejudiced mind can materially misunderstand, and still less disbelieve it, error is not innocent, and the great preservative from falling into it is the love of God. Such is manifestly the import of the following passages—"If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God—Why do ye not understand my speech? even because ye cannot hear my word—If I say the truth, why do ye not believe me? He that is of God heareth God's words: ye therefore hear them not because ye are not of God—We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us, Hereby know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error."* If it be objected that 'good men err, and that to ascribe their errors to prejudice, and the want of love to God, is uncandid'—we answer, No good man is free from prejudice, nor does he love God as he ought. To ascribe the errors of others to the same causes as we ascribe our own, supposing us to be in error, cannot be uncandid. If we loved God as we ought, there would be no prejudice hanging about our minds, and we should imbibe the truth as angels imbibe it.

* John vii. 9. viii. 43, 46, 47. 1 John iv. 6.

desiring above all things to look into it. And if we loved him more than we do, we should be more secure than we are from the seducing influence of error. Hence it is that "the anointing" of the Holy Spirit is represented as "teaching us of all things, and causing us to abide in the truth.* Hence also those who have apostatized from the truth are described as not having cordially believed it, but as taking pleasure in unrighteousness.†

Fourthly, *It is the love of God which is the grand spring of evangelical obedience.*—Respect to ourselves, and regard to our present interests, will produce a correctness of conduct sufficient to excite the respect of those around us; but this is not religion. There is no true religion without the love of God; and if, as hath been already stated, the love of the law, of the gospel, of our fellow-creatures and fellow-christians, and even of Christ himself, be only the love of God ramified, it must follow that without this we shall not be able to exercise the others, but be merely "lovers of our own selves." If we take heed to this, we shall have but little else to take heed to, as every duty will become our delight, and be cheerfully discharged as a matter of course.

* 1 John ii. 27. † 2 Thes. ii. 10—12.

Hence we see the force of the wise man's precept, "Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life." Look well to the fountain, or the streams will in vain be expected to be pure. To watch our words and actions to the neglect of our hearts, will be unavailing.

III. LET US CONSIDER THE DANGER WE ARE IN OF DECLINING FROM THE LOVE OF GOD.—The serious tone of caution with which the precept is delivered is expressive of this sentiment; it is only in cases of great danger that we are charged to "take good heed."

The love of God is a plant of heavenly extraction; but, being planted in an unfriendly soil, it requires to be well guarded and watered. We are not only surrounded with objects which attract our affections, and operate as rivals to the blessed God, but have a propensity to depart from him. Whether we consider ourselves as individuals or as societies, this will be found to be the case.

In the early stages of the christian life, love is frequently ardent. The first believing views of the grace of the gospel, furnish matter of joyful surprise: and a flow of grateful affection

is the natural consequence. "I love the Lord because he hath heard my voice, and my supplications: because he hath inclined his ear unto me I will call upon him as long as I live."* At this season we can scarcely conceive it possible to forget him who hath done such great things for us: but if twenty years of cares and temptations pass over us without producing this effect, it will be happy for us.

In declining from our first love we are seldom sensible of it till some of its effects appear; as neglecting the more spiritual exercises of religion, or contenting ourselves with attending to them as a matter of form without enjoying God in them, or trifling with those sins from which we should heretofore have started back with horror. Our friends often perceive it, and feel concerned on account of it, before we are aware of it ourselves; and happy is it for us, if by their timely admonitions, or by any other means, we are awakened from our lethargy, and saved from some greater fall, to the dishonour of God and the wounding of our future peace.

I have heard this departure from our first love spoken of as a matter of course, or as that

* Psalms cxvi. 1, 2.

which must be expected. Nay, I have heard it compared to the time when Isaac was *weaned*, at which Abraham made a feast! Some old religious professors, who have become sufficiently cold and carnal themselves, will thus endeavour to reconcile young Christians to the same state of mind; telling them with a cunning sort of smile, that they are at present on the mount of enjoyment, but must expect to come down. And true it is, that love, though it may become deeper and better grounded, may not always operate with that *tenderness of feeling* as it did at first. A change in the constitution from an advance in years will account for this. Many things relating to the present world which in our youth will produce tears, will not have this effect as we advance in life, though they may still lie with weight upon our minds. But to confound this with religious declension, coldness, and carnality, and to endeavour to reconcile young Christians to it, is erroneous and mischievous. So did not the apostles in their intercourse with young Christians. When Barnabas was sent to visit the young Christians at Antioch, he "saw the grace of God and was glad;" and instead of leading them to expect a state of declension to follow this their first love, he "exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would *cleave*

unto the Lord."* The great head of the church had "somewhat against the Ephesians, because they had left their first love."†

There is no necessity in the nature of things for the abatement of our love, or zeal, or joy. The considerations which formerly excited these feelings have not lost their force. It is as true and as important as ever, that "Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners;" and that he is "able to save to the uttermost all them that come unto God by him;" and, excepting what the first impression derived from its novelty, would, if we had not declined in love, be as interesting to us. So far from our regard for these and other truths being diminished, there is ground for its being increased. Our first views of Christ and his gospel were very defective; if we follow on to know the Lord, we shall know him in a much greater degree. The path of the just if scripturally pursued, will be "as the shining light, shining more and more unto the perfect day." This was the course which the apostles pursued toward the Christians of their times. "And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment—We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren,

* Acts xi. 23. † Rev. ii. 4.

as it is meet, because that your faith groweth exceedingly, and the charity of every one of you all toward each other aboundeth.—Beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord."* The apostle himself did not relax as he drew toward the end of his course, but "forgetting the things that were behind, and reaching forth unto those that were before, he pressed toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."

To decline in our love is practically saying, that we were once more spiritually minded, more tender in conscience, and more devoted to God than was necessary; that we have not found the religion of Jesus so interesting as we expected, and therefore have been obliged to have recourse for happiness to our former pursuits; and that what our old companions told us at the outset, that our zeal would soon abate, and that we should return again to them, was true. "O, my people, what have I done unto thee, and wherein have I weared thee? Testify against me!"

* Phil. i. 9. 2 Thes. i. 3. 1 Cor. xv. 58.

If we be in danger of declining as individuals, we are not less so as *societies*. Societies being composed of individuals, a number of backsliding individuals will soon diffuse their spirit and produce a backsliding people. It was to a people that the words of Joshua were addressed. That generation of Israelites who went up with him into Canaan were distinguished by their love to God. They had seen his judgments upon their unbelieving fathers, whose carcases fell in the wilderness, and had learned wisdom. It was of them that the Lord spake by Jeremiah, saying, "I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals, when thou wentest after me in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown. Israel was holiness unto the Lord, and the first fruits of his increase."* But the very next generation relapsed into idolatry. "Israel served the Lord all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders that overlived Joshua, who had known all the works of the Lord that he had done for Israel. But when they were gathered to their fathers, there arose another generation after them, that knew not the Lord, nor yet the works that he had done for Israel."† Even before the death of their venerable leader, the young people had begun to tamper

* Jer. ii. 2, 3. † Josh. xxiv. 31. Jud. ii. 10.

with idolatry. It was on this account that he assembled the tribes of Shechem, and so solemnly put it to them to "chuse on that day whom they would serve;" and that when they answered, "God forbid that we should forsake the Lord to serve other Gods," he added, "Ye cannot serve the Lord; for he is a holy God: he is a jealous God, he will not forgive your transgressions, nor your sins." This was telling them that they could not serve the Lord and Baalim. Stung with this suggestion, they answered, "Nay, but we *will* serve the Lord." Then, said Joshua, "put away the strange gods that are among you, and incline your heart unto the Lord God of Israel!"*

This interesting account furnishes a picture of human nature. The same things have been acted over again in the world. Religion has rarely been preserved in its purity for many generations. Such is the tendency to degenerate, that the greatest and most important reformations have commonly begun to decline when they who have been principally engaged in it have been gathered to their fathers.

Even the apostles themselves, inspired as they were, could not preserve the churches which they

* Josh. xxiv. 15 -23.

had raised from degeneracy. The Lord had many things against those seven in Asia, to which the apocalypse was addressed. We know also that the great body of professing Christians, in a few centuries, were carried away by the antichristian apostasy: that the descendents of the reformers have mostly renounced their principles; and that the same is true of the descendents of the puritans and non-conformists. Each of these cases furnishes a loud call to us to take good heed unto ourselves that we love the Lord our God!

IV. LET US CONCLUDE WITH A FEW DIRECTIONS AS TO THE MEANS OF PROMOTING THE LOVE OF GOD.—It has been observed already that love is a tender plant, requiring to be both guarded and watered. It will not thrive amongst the weeds of worldly lusts. We cannot serve the Lord in this way; if we would serve him we must "put away our idols, and incline our hearts unto the Lord God of Israel." Beware of *the love of the world.* He that loveth the world, the love of God is not in him. Beware of living in the indulgence of *any sin*: any sin lived in is inconsistent with the love of God. It was on this principle that holy David, after declaring the omniscience and omnipresence of God, invoked

his scrutiny—"Search me O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me; and lead me in the way everlasting."* Wicked *actions* have been found in good men; who have lamented them, and been forgiven: but a wicked *way* is inconsistent with a state of grace; vitiating the very principle of religion, and turning the whole into hypocrisy. Transgression of this nature must lead to perdition. It is an affecting consideration how many professors of religion have been found either before, or soon after they have left the world, to have lived in private drunkenness, concealed lewdness, or undetected fraud!

But it is not merely by avoiding those things which are inconsistent with the love of God, that we shall promote it: we must also attend to those that cherish it. It is by being conversant with the mind of God as revealed in his word; by drawing near to him in private prayer; by associating with the spiritual of his people; by thinking upon his name, especially as displayed in the person and work of Christ, that the love of God will be cherished. As our minds are insensibly assimilated by the books we read,

* Psalm cxxxix. 23. 24.

and the company we keep, so it will be in reading the book of God, and associating with his people; and as the glory of God is manifested in the highest degree in the face of Jesus Christ, this is the principal theme for our meditation. It is by our repairing to the cross that the love of God will be kept alive, and renewed when ready to expire.

SERMON XII.

PHILIPPIANS iii. 10.

.....Being made conformable unto his death.

THE death of Christ is a subject of so much importance in Christianity as to be essential to it. Without this the sacrifices and prophecies of the old testament would be nearly void of meaning, and the other great facts recorded in the new testament divested of importance. It is not so much a member of the body of christian doctrine, as the life-blood that runs through the whole of it. The doctrine of the cross is the christian doctrine. In determining to "know nothing but Jesus Christ and him crucified," the apostle did not mean to contract his researches, or to confine his ministry to a monotonous repetition of a

favourite point, to the neglect of other things: on the contrary, he "shunned not to declare the whole counsel of God." The doctrine of "Christ, and him crucified" comprehended this: it contained such a scope, that, inspired as he was, surpassed his powers; and well it might, for angels could not comprehend it, but are described as merely "desiring to look into it." There is not an important truth but what is pre-supposed by it, included in it, or arises out of it; nor any part of practical religion but what hangs upon it.

It was from this doctrine that the new testament writers fetched their most powerful motives. Do they recommend *humility*? It is thus—"Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus; who being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God; but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross."* Do they enforce an unreserved *devotedness to God?* It is thus—"Ye are not your own: for ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body,

* Phil. ii. 5—7.

and in your spirit, which are God's."* If they would provoke Christians to *brotherly love*, it is from the same consideration—"Herein is love; not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another."† Do they urge a *forgiving spirit?* It is thus—"Be ye kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you."‡ Do they recommend *benevolence* to the poor? It is from this—"For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, who, though he was rich, for our sakes became poor, that we through his poverty might be made rich."—"Thanks be to God for his unspeakable gift!"§ Finally, The common duties of *domestic life* are enforced from this principle—"Husbands love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it."‖

It is in immediate relation to this great principle, that both the ordinances of baptism and the supper appear to have been instituted. As many as were baptized were baptized into Christ's

* 1 Cor. vi. 20. † 1 John iv. 10, 11. ‡ Ephes. iv. 32.
§ 2 Cor. viii. 9. ix. 15. ‖ Ephes. v. 25.

death;* and in eating the bread, and drinking the wine, they were directed to do it "in remembrance of him." It was a wonderful instance of condescending love in the Lord Jesus to desire to be remembered by us. Had we requested, in the language of the converted thief, to be remembered by him, there had been nothing surprising in it: but it is of the nature of dying love to desire to live in the remembrance of those who are dear to us. It was not, however, on his own account, but on ours that he left this dying request. He knew that to remember him would answer every case that could occur. If afflicted, this would be our solace; if persecuted, the consideration of him that had endured such contradictions of sinners, would prevent our being weary and faint in our minds; if guilty, this would point out the way of forgiveness; or if tempted to turn aside, this would bind us to his name and cause.

It was by a believing view of this great subject that the apostle at the first counted all his former privileges and attainments "loss;" and though in consequence of renouncing judaism he had exchanged all his earthly prospects for "hunger, and thirst, and nakedness, and perils, and bitter

* Rom. vi. 3.

persecutions, yet after thirty years experience, he does not repent, but in a tone of heavenly triumph adds, "Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, and be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith!"

A mind thus imbued in the sacred theme, we should think must have known much of Christ already, and compared with us so he must; yet after all that he had thought, and preached, and written, he makes nothing of his attainments, but adopts the language of one that had in a manner every thing to learn—"That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death."

The last of these vehement desires seems to be explanatory of some, if not all, that precede it. That is, he would know him, and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his sufferings, as "*being* made conformable unto his death."

The sentiment conveyed appears to be, *that the death of Christ is a model to which Christians must aspire to be conformed.* This sentiment we shall endeavour to illustrate and confirm.

There are other models beside the death of Christ, but they are included in this. The *law* of God is that to which we must be conformed. If we be born from above, it is "written in our hearts." But as one great end of Christ's death was to honour the divine law, not only in its precept but its penalty, a conformity to the one must include a conformity to the other. The *character* of God also is represented as a model to which believers are conformed—The new man is created "*after God*, in righteousness and true holiness:" but, as in the death of Christ God was glorified in the highest, a conformity to this must be a conformity to the divine character.—The *lives of holy men* are also held up for our imitation; but as this is only in so far as they are followers of Christ, a conformity to him includes all that is required of us respecting them.

We shall consider the death of Christ in four views; namely, in respect of the principles on which it proceeded—the motives by which it was induced—the spirit with which it was endured—

and the ends which it accomplished. Under each of these views we shall find things to which we must be conformed. Observe,

I. THE PRINCIPLES ON WHICH THE DEATH OF CHRIST PROCEEDED.—In them we shall find a standard by which to form our principles, and shall be able to judge whether they be of God.

First, The death of Chist pre-supposes *that we deserved to die.*—A sense of this truth is at the foundation of all true religion: it requires therefore that we be made conformable to it. God, in the gift of his Son to die, judged us to have been worthy of death; Christ, in giving himself to die, evinced himself to be of the same mind; and such must be our mind, or we can have no interest in the glorious results. Till we see and feel that God is in the right, that we are in the wrong, and that if he had cast us off for ever, it had been no more than we deserved, we shall be strangers to repentance, and as incapable of believing in Christ for salvation as he that is whole is of appreciating the value of a physician.

Secondly, The death of Christ pre-supposes *that sin is exceeding sinful.*—If it were a matter of small account, it may be presumed that the Father would

not have made so much of it as to give his Son to be made a sacrifice to atone for it: and that the Son of God would not have laid down his life for that purpose. The curses of the law, and the judgments inflicted at different times on sinners, furnish strong proof of the malignant nature of sin; especially when the native goodness of God is taken into consideration; but the blood of the cross furnishes much stronger. It was a great thing for the Creator to destroy the work of his hands, and is so represented—"The Lord said, I will destroy man, *whom I have created*, from the face of the earth!"* But to smite his beloved Son was greater. To be made conformable to this principle, we must not conceive of sin as the *weakness* or *frailty* of human nature, a mere *imperfection* which a good God must needs overlook. Neither must we give heed to those systems of religion which are founded upon these depreciating notions, which, however they may flatter us for the present, will in the end assuredly deceive us.

Thirdly, The death of Christ pre-supposes *that there was nothing in all our doings or sufferings that could furnish a ground of salvation, or a single consideration for which we might*

* Gen. vi. 7.

be forgiven.—Had it been otherwise, Christ would not have died. Men have ever been busily employed in endeavours to propitiate the Deity. Some by ceremonial observances, and some by moral; but instead of accomplishing the object, they have only made the case worse. Even those services which were of divine appointment became, in their hands, offensive; God was weary of their offerings. Christ is represented as taking the work out of their hands; "Sacrifice and offering thou didst not desire; mine ears hast thou opened; burnt-offering and sin-offering hast thou not required: then said I lo, I come!"* They were indeed required as duties for the time, but not for the purpose of making atonement. Not tears, nor prayers, nor alms, nor any other of our doings, will avail as terms of acceptance with God. If we are conformed to the death of Christ, we shall know and feel this to be the case, and shall seek salvation by grace only through the Mediator. If we are not conformed to the death of Christ in this respect, we have no reason to expect any interest in it.

Fourthly, The death of Christ pre-supposes *that for mercy to be exercised in a way consistently*

* Psalm xl. 8.

with the honour of God, it required to be through a sacrifice of infinite value.—When the apostle declares that "it was not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins," he plainly intimates that the inherent value of the sacrifice was of essential importance as to its effect. If it were impossible for animal sacrifices to atone for sin, it must be on account of their insufficiency to demonstrate either the hatred of God to sin, or his love to sinners: but the same reason would apply to the sacrifice of Christ, if he were merely a creature. Hence those who deny his divinity, with perfect consistency deny also his atonement. But on the principle of his divinity, his sufferings were of infinite value; and to this the scriptures ascribe their efficacy. A careful reader of the new testament will perceive that in exhibiting the *value* and *efficacy* of his death, it connects it with the inherent dignity of his person—"Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had *by himself purged our sins*, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high." We have a GREAT high priest that is passed into the heavens, Jesus THE SON OF GOD—The blood of Jesus Christ HIS SON *cleanseth us from all sin.**

* Heb. i. 3. iv. 14. 1 John i. 7.

The result is, that to be made conformable to the death of Christ, we must think highly of it, and not reduce it to the mere death of a martyr. It is a serious thing to make light of the Saviour, and of the work of salvation. "He that despised Moses' law died without mercy, under two or three witnesses; of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant wherewith he was sanctified an unholy (or common) thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace? For we know him that hath said, Vengeance belongeth unto me; I will recompense saith the Lord. And again, The Lord shall judge his people. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God!"* Let us observe,

II. THE MOTIVES BY WHICH THE DEATH OF CHRIST WAS INDUCED.—In these we shall find a blessed example to imitate. They may all be summed in *love;* love to God and men; love great, disinterested, and unparallelled.

There never was such an example of the *love of God* as that which is furnished by the obedience and death of Christ. It was his meat and

* Heb. x. 28, 31.

drink to do the will of his Father. He did not know his nearest relations, but as doing his Father's will. When the bitter cup was presented to him he said, "Now is my soul troubled, and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour? but for this cause came I unto this hour. Father glorify thy name."* What was this but exposing his breast, as we should say, to the sword of justice; consenting to be made a sacrifice that God might be glorified in the salvation of sinners? It was love working in a way of grief that caused that affecting exclamation, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me!" He could endure the cross, and even despise the shame; he could bear to be betrayed, denied, and forsaken by his own disciples: but to be forsaken of God, wounded him beyond any thing. O, to be made conformable to his death in these things; to love God so as to account it our meat and drink to do his will; so as to reckon his friends our friends, and his cause our cause; to be willing to do any thing, or suffer any thing for his name's sake; and to feel the withholding of his favour our severest loss.

As there never was such love to God as that which was manifested by Christ, so neither was

* John xii. 27, 28.

there ever such *love to men.* "He loved us, and gave *himself* for us"—"loved us, and washed us from our sins *in his own blood.*" The love of creatures is ordinarily founded on something lovely in the object; but Christ died for us while we were yet enemies. To be made conformable to his death in this, is to bear good will to men, to seek their present and everlasting welfare in every way that is within our power, and this notwithstanding the unloveliness of their character and conduct. "Love them that hate you, and pray for them that despitefully use you, and persecute you." Unbelievers, who know no principle superior to self-love, have represented this precept of our Lord as unnatural and extravagant. Yet they themselves are daily partaking of his bounty, who causeth his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and his rain to descend on the just and on the unjust. If they were the children of that Being, whom they acknowledge, they would in some degree resemble him. Such was the example of Jesus, and such must be ours if we be made conformable to him. Observe,

III. THE SPIRIT WITH WHICH THE SUFFERINGS AND DEATH OF CHRIST WERE ENDURED.—In this we shall find a model for our spirit. The Lord Jesus was possessed of all the original passions

of human nature; as love, joy, sorrow, grief, anger, indignation, &c. When reproached and injured, he felt it; his "enduring the cross, and despising the shame," was not owing to his being insensible to either, but to "the joy set before him." The purity of his nature did not extinguish his passions; but rendered them subordinate to the will of his Father. With the greatest sensibility to reproach and injury, he was meek and lowly of heart. Under all the reproaches and false accusations that were preferred against him on his trial, he preserved a dignified silence: Not a word was uttered tending to save his life: but when questioned on the truth of his messiahship, he with equal dignity and firmness avowed it, though he knew the avowal would cost him his life. Nor did the contradiction and abuse which he received from his executioners extinguish his compassion toward them: while they were nailing him to the cross he prayed, saying, "Father forgive them: for they know not what they do!"

If we observe the spirit of the apostles, we shall find them to have made him their pattern. "Being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we suffer it; being defamed we intreat; we are made as the filth of the world, and the off-scouring of all things unto this day." There appears to have

been a holy emulation in the apostle Paul to be a follower of his Lord, even unto death. He kept his eye on Christ in all that befel him. "If we suffer, we shall reign *with him*—We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed; *always bearing about in the body, the dying of the Lord Jesus*, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body. For we who live are always delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh."* Such was that conformity to the death of Christ after which he panted with the most vehement desire. Nothing was farther from his thoughts than partaking with him in the work of redemption; but so far as fellowship in his sufferings was admissible, it was the object of his most ardent desire. O, to be thus made like him, and like his faithful followers! We proceed to observe,

IV. The ends which the death of Christ accomplished.—In them, though there is much which is peculiar to himself, yet there is also much in which we are made conformable to him.

* 2 Cor. iv. 8—11.

Did he *satisfy divine justice*, and thereby open the way of salvation? Certainly it is not for us to attempt any thing like this; but by believing in him we *acquiesce* in what he has done and suffered, and so are made conformable to it. Nor is this confined to our our first believing: the more we know of Christ, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, the more we are in this way made conformable to his death. The death of Christ will give the impression to the very enjoyment of heaven. "The Lamb that was slain" will be the theme of the song for ever.

Was he "manifested to *destroy the works of the devil*?" If we be made conformable to his death, we also shall wage war with them. If we live in sin, we are "of the devil," and must needs be at variance with the death of Christ, sparing that which he was manifested in human nature to destroy. The finished work of Christ upon the cross did not supersede the necessity of our being active in overcoming evil. We must set our feet upon the necks of these spiritual enemies, taking a part in their destruction. Neither did it supersede the necessity of our active perseverence in the use of all means by which we may disengage our souls from the

entanglements of sin, praying, and struggling from under its dominion, perfecting holiness in the fear of God. It is thus that we have to "work out our own salvation with fear and trembling;" and which, instead of superseding the death of Christ, is being made conformable to it. From his having died *for* sin we are exhorted to die *to* it, and to live unto God.* We cannot enter into the end of Christ's death, which was to make an end of sin, unless we become dead to it; nor into his resurrection, without rising with him into newness of life.

In waging war with sin it is necessary to begin with ourselves, but not to end there. If we be made conformable to the death of Christ, we shall be adverse to sin wherever we find it; avoiding all participation in it through complaisance or worldly interest, and uniting to promote sobriety, righteousness, and godliness in its place.

Finally, Christ died *to save sinners*; and if we be made conformable to his death, we also shall seek their salvation. Some of the first thoughts which occur to a believer's mind, on having found rest for his own soul, respect the salvation of his

* Rom. vi. 3—6.

kindred and acquaintance; and the directions given to one who had obtained mercy gives countenance to such thoughts and desires—"Go home to thy friends and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee, and hath had compassion on thee."*

It is not for ministers only to take an interest in the salvation of men: the army of the Lamb is composed of the whole body of Christians.—Every disciple of Jesus should consider himself as a missionary. All indeed are not apostles, nor evangelists, nor preachers; but all must be engaged in serving the Lord: some by preaching, some by contributing of their substance, and all by prayer and recommending the Saviour by a holy conversation.

The death of Christ stands connected in the divine promise with the salvation of sinners. This is "the travail of his soul," which he was to see and be satisfied; the "joy set before him," in view of which he endured the cross, and despised the shame. To be made conformable unto his death therefore, we must combine that which God has combined with it. It is a high honour conferred on us to be instruments in thus

* Mark v. 19.

saving our fellow-sinners, and in thus crowning our Redeemer: nor will it be less advantageous to us, since he hath said, "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne."

THE LIFE OF CHRIST THE SECURITY AND FELICITY OF HIS CHURCH.

SERMON XIII.

REVELATION i. 18.

I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death.

SOME of the most important writings in the church of Christ have been occasioned by the persecutions of its enemies. The psalms of David, in which a good man will find all the devout feelings of his heart pourtrayed, were mostly occasioned by the oppositions of the wicked. Many of Paul's epistles were written from prison; and this book, which contains a system of prophecy from the ascension of Christ to the end of time, was communicated to the beloved

disciple when in a state of banishment. Thus it is that the wrath of man is made to praise God: so much of it as would not answer this end is restrained.

Some of the most distinguished prophets under the old testament were introduced to their work by an extraordinary and impressive vision. It was thus with Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel; and thus it was with the writer of this book. They beheld the glory of Jehovah in a manner suitable to the dispensation under which they lived: he, being under a new dispensation, of which Christ was exalted to be the head, saw his glory both divine and human; as the Alpha and Omega, the first and the last, and as the Son of Man walking in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks.

On seeing him, the apostle fell at his feet as dead. He on whose bosom he could formerly lean with all the familiarity of a friend, is now possessed of a glory too great to be sustained by a mortal man. But yet how sweetly is this awful grandeur tempered with gentleness and goodness. "He laid his right hand upon me, saying unto me, Fear not, I am the first and the last; I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am

alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death."

The force and beauty of the passage will appear to advantage if we observe the circumstances of the church and of the apostle at the time. It is supposed to be about the year 95, under the persecution of Domitian. The church at that time was under a dark cloud. Great numbers of the first Christians, and the first ministers would now have finished their course; many would be cut off by the persecution: all the apostles were dead, excepting John, and he was banished. To an eye of sense it would appear as if the cause must be crushed. How cheering in such circumstances must it have been to be told, *I am he that liveth!* The Assyrian invasion in the times of Hezekiah filled the breadth of Immanuel's land; but while Jerusalem was preserved the head was above water, and the body politic, though overflowed even to the neck, would yet live.* Much more would the church in the midst of persecution. While Christ her head lived, she could not die.

It was "on the Lord's day" that the apostle was favoured with this extraordinary vision, the

* Isa. viii. 8.

day in which he had risen from the dead, which circumstance would add force to what he said of himself as having been dead, but as being now alive. It was the day also in which the churches were assembled, as far as their persecuted state would admit, for Christian worship; and while they doubtless remembered the venerable apostle in their prayers, the Lord by him remembered and provided for them.

There is a charming circumlocution in the passage, which surprises and overwhelms the mind. The Lord might have said, as on a former occasion, *Be not afraid, it is I;* but he describes himself in language full of the richest consolation—"I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, and have the keys of hell and of death!"

Let us observe the characters which our Lord assumes—consider them as a ground of security to the church—and conclude with a few reflections.

I. LET US OBSERVE THE CHARACTERS WHICH OUR LORD ASSUMES.—The words contain four positions; viz. that he liveth—that he liveth who

was dead—that he liveth for evermore—and that he hath the keys of hell and of death.

First, He saith "I am he that *liveth*" It is a truth that Christ liveth, and always did and will live as *the first and the last*; but the life here spoken of being that which succeeded to his death was possessed in the same nature as that in which he died. It was the life which commenced at his resurrection; when "being raised from the dead, he dieth no more: death hath no more dominion over him."* It consists not merely in existence, but in that "blessing, and honour, and glory" which he received as the reward of his humiliation. It is the possession of that joy that was set before him, in the prospect of which he endured the cross, and despised the shame.

There appears to be something more in the words I am he that liveth, than if it had been said *I live*; for this had been true of millions as well as of him, whereas that which is spoken is something peculiar to him. Paul saith of himself, *I live*; but when he had said it he in a manner recalled his words, adding, *yet not I, but Christ*

* Rom. vi. 9.

liveth in me. Christ is not only possessed of life himself, but communicates it to others: his life involves that of the church, and of every individual believer in him. In his life they live, and will live for evermore.

In the life of Christ we trace the execution of the great designs of his death. It is as *living* that he intercedes for us at the right hand of God. "If, (saith the apostle Paul,) when we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more being reconciled, we shall be saved by his *life*."* We see here three distinct stages in the work of Christ. First, by his death he made atonement for us. This is expressed by his having "reconciled us to God," or restored us to his favour as the Lawgiver and Judge of the world. Secondly, by his word and spirit we are subdued to the obedience of faith, so as of enemies to become friends. This is expressed by our "being reconciled," or brought into a state of actual peace and friendship with God.—Thirdly, By his *life* he saves us. This is that branch of salvation which is effected by his intercession, and which is denominated saving us to the *uttermost*. From the two first, the apostle argues the last, as from what Christ did for us

* Rom. v. 10.

when enemies to what he will do for us now that we are friends, and from his having begun the work to his carrying it on to perfection.

In the *life* of Christ we trace all the important blessings of his reign. The promise of the "sure mercies of David" is alleged by the apostle as a proof of the resurrection of Christ.* But how does this appear? By "the sure mercies of David" as promised in Isaiah 55th, there is doubtless a reference to the covenant made with David, "ordered in all things and sure, and which contained all his salvation, and all his desire."† But this covenant was to be fulfilled in the everlasting kingdom of Christ. The sure mercies of David therefore, are the blessings of the Messiah's kingdom, the bestowment of which imply his resurrection; for if death had continued to have dominion over him, no such kingdom could have existed. The sum is, that in saying to his servant John, "I am he that liveth," he furnished one of the richest sources of consolation to the church in its state of tribulation.

Secondly, He speaks of his life as succeeding to his death: "I am he that liveth, *and was dead.*" This part of the description would remove all

* Acts xiii, 34. † 2 Sam. xxiii. 5.

doubts, if any existed, as to who he was. The disparity between his present appearance and what he was when the apostle saw and conversed with him in the flesh, must be exceedingly great, and might tend to stagger his belief in his being the same person; but this speech, whatever doubts he felt, would at once remove them. 'Yes, it is my Lord himself, and not another, It is he whom I saw expire upon the cross!'

The connexion between the death of Christ on earth, and his succeeding life in glory, renders each of them more interesting. There is great joy derived from the consideration of salvation through the *death* of Christ. It is the burden of the heavenly song. But this would be no joy were it not for the consideration of his life. What if we could all have obtained salvation; yet if it must have been at the expense of the everlasting blessedness of our deliverer, who could have enjoyed it? What would the feast be if the Lord of the feast were not there? Though in enduring the death of the cross he had "spoiled principalities and powers, and made a show of them openly;" yet if he had not lived to enjoy his triumphs, what would they have been to the redeemed, and even to the angelic world? If the King's Son had been lost, the victory of that day

would have been turned into mourning. If it had been possible for him to be holden of death, the loss to the moral empire of God must have exceeded the gain, and the saved themselves must have been ashamed to appear in heaven at the expense of the general good! But we are not called to so painful a trial. Our salvation, expensive as it was, was not at this expense. He *was dead*, but he liveth! "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead!"

And as the life of Christ adds to the joy arising from his death, so the death of Christ adds to the joy arising from his life. There is great joy, as we have seen derived from his life; but it would not be what it is, if this his life had not succeeded his death. The life of Isaac was dear to Abraham before he attempted to offer him up a sacrifice; but it would be much more so when he had received him "as from the dead." The life of Joseph was dear to Jacob when he dwelt with him in the vale of Hebron; but it would be much more so after his having in a manner buried him. If Christ had never divested himself of the glory which he had with the

Father before the world was, it would not have been that to us which it will be. The very angels, though he died not for them, nor for any of their species, yet honour him as "the Lamb that was slain." And as to the redeemed themselves, their song is sweeter still, "Thou art worthy, (say they,)—for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood, out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; and hast made us unto our God kings and priests; and we shall reign on the earth!"

Thirdly, He describes himself not only as "he that liveth, and was dead, but as being *alive for evermore*." He was raised not only to life, but to an immortal life. "He dieth no more: death hath no more dominion over him." This cheering truth arises from the *perfection* of his sacrifice. The sacrifices under the law could not take away sin, but were mere shadows of good things to come, and therefore required to be often repeated; but the sacrifice of Christ was "*once* for all." The scriptures lay great stress upon the term *once*, as applied to the sacrifice of Christ: it is used no less than six times in this connexion.* "Christ being raised from the dead, (saith the

* Rom. vi. 10. Heb. vii. 27. ix. 26, 28. x. 10. 1 Pet. iii. 18.

apostle,) dieth no more: death hath no more dominion over him;"—and thus he accounts for it,—"For in that he died, he died unto sin *once*: but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God."* A transient suffering in so divine a person was sufficient to expiate that which would have subjected us to everlasting punishment, and to lay the foundation of a permanent life with God, both for himself and for all those who believe in him. Such was the value of his sacrifice that its influence will continue for ever: even when the work of mediation shall be perfected, and the kingdom as mediatorial "delivered up to the Father, that God may be all in all," Christ will live and be the life of the church for ever. In that state where there will be *no temple*, the Lord God Almighty, *and the Lamb* are said to be the temple thereof;" and the reason given for there being no need of the sun, nor of the moon is, that the glory of God will lighten it, and *the Lamb* will be the light thereof."

The "Amen" which follows this part of the description seems to be added by the apostle, and designed to express the satisfaction that he felt in the life of Christ. The words *O King, live for ever*, as addressed to an Asiatic sovereign,

* Rom. vi. 9, 10.

could only express the wish of the party that his life might be continued, and that in most cases was mere flattery: but here is neither flattery nor hyperbole. The Lord declares that he lives for ever, and the apostle adds to it his cordial Amen!

Fourthly, He declares the authority with which he is invested—"And have the keys of hell and of death." By "hell and death" I understand the powers of the invisible world, which in reward of his humiliation and death were put under his controul. "God raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come; and put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church—He is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God; angels and authorities, and powers being made subject to him."* Hell, with all its machinations, can do no more than he permits; and death, with all its terrors, comes and goes at his bidding.

But why are hell and death *only* mentioned, as subjected to Christ? Does not his empire

* Ephes. i. 20–22. 1 Pet. 3, 22.

extend to the church as well as to the world, and to the visible as well as to the invisible powers? Certainly it does: "All power in heaven and earth is given to him:" but there was a fitness in his here mentioning that part only of his empire which was hostile to the church, and that kind of hostility which at the time threatened to destroy it. Persecution is the storming work of hell and of death on the strong holds of Zion. Hell furnishes the plan, and death carries it into execution. Men indeed have a concern in what is done against the church; but it is as agents of the wicked one: the visible world therefore, may be overlooked as being influenced by the invisible. To controul an army it is sufficient to controul those that influence its movements.

II. LET US CONSIDER THESE INTERESTING CHARACTERS AS A SOURCE OF SECURITY AND FELICITY TO THE CHURCH.—The existence of the church in this depraved world is one of the wonders of Providence. It is a vessel living in a tempestuous sea; a bush on fire, yet not consumed. If we reflect on the enmity of the wicked against the righteous, their great superiority over them, the attempts that have been made to exterminate them, the frequent diminution of their numbers by defection and death;

their existence and especially their increase must be wonderful, and can no otherwise be accounted for but that Christ liveth.

When they were "few in number, and wandered as strangers from one nation to another, he suffered no man to hurt them; he reproved kings for their sakes, saying, Touch not mine anointed, and do my prophets no harm." In Egypt he saw their affliction, and came down to deliver them. Of Jerusalem the enemy said, "Rase it, rase it to the foundation; but the Lord remembered it, and destroyed its destroyer. Under the Persian dominion the captives were restored to their own land; yet even then the enemy intrigued against them; so that for one and twenty years the building of the temple was hindered, and the prayers of the prophet Daniel were unanswered. Thus it was, I conceive, that "the prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood the angel for *one and twenty days:* but lo, Michael the chief prince stood with him and helped him.*

* Dan. x. 13, 21. Prideaux reckons from the first interruption of the Jews in rebuilding the temple, to the last sentence of Darius in their favour, only *twenty years;* namely, from the third year of Cyrus to the eighth of Darius Hystaspis; but from Dan. x. 1—4, it appears that though the opposition openly commenced in the third year, yet it had been at work in the second. It was within three days of the beginning of the

Under the gospel dispensation, as the church became more spiritual, the hatred increased; and as religion was from hence more of a personal than a national concern, such was the opposition directed against it. But still the Great Head of the church lived. The persecution which raged at the time of this prophecy was the second of ten cruel persecutions from the heathen emperors; and though after this the government became professedly Christian, yet such were the corruptions which entered in at this door, that in a little time that which was called the Christian church became an antichristian harlot, persecuting the servants of Jesus with a cruelty equal, if not superior to that of heathens. These floods filled the breadth of Immanuel's land, reaching even to the neck: but the church's Head being above water, she has survived them all.

Often have we seen in our smaller circles the cause of God reduced to a low condition; sometimes by the falling away of characters who

third year that the prophet began to mourn; if one cause of this mourning therefore, was the obstruction to the work of God at Jerusalem, it must have begun in the second year; which makes it twenty-one years, corresponding with the "three full weeks" of the prophet's mourning, and with the "one and twenty days" of the angel's detention, according to the usual prophetic reckoning, a day for a year.

seemed to be pillars, and sometimes by the removal of great and good men by death. But under all this it is our comfort, the Lord liveth—the government is on his shoulder.

Finally, The life of Christ involves not only the security of the church on earth, but its felicity in heaven. The members being united with the head, their life is bound up with his life. Even in the present world, if one says, "I live," he must recollect himself, with the apostle, and add, "Yet not I, but Christ liveth in me;" but if it be so in respect of spiritual life in this world, it will be so as to eternal life in the world to come. Every thing which our Lord did and suffered was for us; and every degree of glory that he possesses in reward of it is for us: for us he became incarnate, died, rose from the dead, ascended into heaven, and liveth at the right hand of God. "Your life is hid with Christ in God: and when Christ who is your life shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory."

From the whole, we see—First, That the way to everlasting life is to believe in Jesus. The way of life according to the tenor of the first covenant was, "The man that doeth these things shall live by them:" but the way of life to a

sinner is "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved."* It is as believing in the Son of God that we are interested in him, and having him, have everlasting life. We have in the life of Christ the greatest possible encouragement to believe in him and be saved; for it is as "ever living to make intercession for us, that he is able to save to the uttermost all those that come unto God by him."

O, my hearers! this is the hinge on which our salvation or damnation turns. To refuse him in favour of your own righteousness, or of any other idol, is to refuse life; and to hate him is to love death. The question put to the house of Israel is no less applicable to you than it was to them, "Why will ye die?" Those who believe not in him are as unwilling to come to him that they may have life, as the house of Israel was to cast away their transgressions; God has no more pleasure in the death of him that dieth eternally than he had in the death of those who perished under some temporal calamity; nor is the one any more at variance with the doctrine of election than the other was with the doctrine of

* Rom. x. 5—9.

decrees in general, or of God's doing all things after the counsel of his own will.*

Secondly, The same truth, like the cloud in the wilderness, wears a bright side to believers, and a dark side to unbelievers. The life of Christ will be the death of his enemies. To behold him coming in the clouds of heaven, invested with the keys of hell and of death, must fill their hearts with dismay. The same power that has so often shut the door of destruction against his servants, so as to forbid their entrance, will shut it upon his enemies, so as to leave no hope of escape.

* The doctrine of *free will,* as opposed to that of *free grace,* is not that in doing good we act according to our choice, and require to be exhorted to it, and warned against the contrary: this is manifestly scriptural and proper: but that it is owing to our free will that we are disposed to chuse the good and refuse the evil; if not to the exclusion of divine grace, yet to the rendering it effectual by properly improving it, and so to *making ourselves to differ*

CHRISTIANITY THE ANTIDOTE TO PRESUMPTION AND DESPAIR.

SERMON XIV.

1 JOHN, ii. 1.

My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.

WHEN our Saviour ascended up on high, his disciples, who were looking stedfastly toward heaven after him, were thus accosted by the angels—"Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus who is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven."* It might seem by this language that whatever

* Acts i. 10, 11.

our Lord might do for us in the intermediate period, it was not for us to be made acquainted with it. And it has been suggested that we are ignorant not only of "the place where he resides, but of the occupations in which he is engaged."* There is indeed nothing revealed on these subjects to gratify curiosity; but much to satisfy faith. If we know not God we may be expected to think lightly of sin, and meanly of the Saviour; and if in consequence of this we disown his atonement, and perceive no need of his intercession and advocateship with the Father, there will be nothing surprising in it. With such a state of mind we might have lived at the time when "God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the gentiles, believed on in the world, and received up into glory," and have been no more interested by any of these events than were the unbelieving part of the Jewish nation. But if we entertain just sentiments of the moral character and government of God, we shall perceive the evil of sin, and the need of a divine Saviour, shall consider his atonement as the only ground of a sinner's hope, and his intercession and advocateship with the Father as necessary to our being saved to the uttermost.

* *Mr. Belsham's Review of Mr. Wilberforce's Treatise, p.* 35.

To satisfy ourselves that such were the sentiments of the Apostles, it is sufficient candidly to read their writings. If their authority be rejected, so it must be; but it is vain to attempt to disguise their meaning. And before we reject their authority it will be well to consider the force of their testimony concerning themselves and their doctrine. "We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us. Hereby know we the spirit of truth and the spirit of error." They were either what they professed to be, or presumptuous impostors; and what they said of hearing their doctrine as a test of being *of God*, was either true, or they were false witnesses of God; and as all that we know of Christ is from their writings and those of the evangelists, if theirs be false witness, Christianity itself has nothing to authenticate it.

"My little children," said the venerable apostle, "these things write I unto you, that ye sin not." This is the bearing of all my writings, as well as of all my other labours. Yet while I warn you against sin, knowing that there is not a just man upon earth that doeth good and sinneth not, let me remind you that "we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous."

Such is the doctrine of the Apostle, *an antidote both to presumption and despair*. He that hath an ear to hear, let him hear it. Observe,

I. THE GENERAL CHARGE WHICH CHRISTIANITY GIVES TO ITS ADHERENTS.—"These things write I unto you that ye sin not."—This is to repress *presumption*.—This is the bearing not only of the writings of John, but of the whole scriptures: this is the object at which every doctrine and every precept aims.

It may be thought, and has sometimes been said, that 'all religions tend to make men better,' and therefore, that this property of the Apostle's doctrine, has nothing peculiar in it. But this is a gratuitous assumption. All religions do not tend to make men better, but many of them much worse. Nay, so far is this assumption from being true, that Christianity is the only religion that strictly speaking is opposed to sin. That men of all religions have paid some attention to morals is true; but in doing so they have not been influenced so much by their religion as by the necessity which all men feel of maintaining somewhat of a correct conduct towards one another. As to sin against God there is no religion but that of the bible that pays any regard

to it. And even Christianity itself, in so far as it is corrupted, loses this property. Every system of religion may be known by this, whether it be of God, or not. If it delight in calling sin by extenuating names; or represent repentance and good works as sufficient to atone for it; or prescribe ceremonial remedies for allaying the remorse which it produces, it makes light of sin, and is not of God. Every doctrine and precept in the bible makes much of sin, and this is as much a distinguishing peculiarity of the true religion as any principle that can be named.

Some doctrines are directly of a *warning* nature. Are we taught for instance, the omniscience and omnipresence of God? What can be more pungent than such sentiments as these? "O Lord, thou hast searched me and known me. Thou knowest my down-sitting and mine uprising, thou understandest my thoughts afar off. Thou compassest my path, and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a word in my tongue, but lo, O Lord, thou knowest it altogether. Thou hast beset me behind and before, and laid thine hand upon me.—Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I take

the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me."* Every sentiment here, saith to us *sin not.* Are we taught the *holiness* of God? It is that we may be holy. "Who is like unto thee O Lord, amongst the gods? Who is like thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?"†—"Ye cannot serve the Lord, for he is an holy God: he is a jealous God, he will not forgive your transgressions and your sins.‡ Such is the object of all the divine *precepts* and *threatenings.* Let us seriously read the twenty-eighth chapter of Deuteronomy, and ask ourselves, what could induce the kindest and best of Beings thus strictly to enjoin his will, and thus to scatter his curses against the breach of them? Finally, such is the object of all the accounts of *justice and judgments* as executed on transgressors. The histories of the flood; of the burning of Sodom and Gomorrah; of the plagues of Egypt, and the destruction of the Egyptians in the Red Sea; of the punishments on the rebellious Israelites in the wilderness; of the destruction of the city and temple of Jerusalem, first by the Chaldeans, and afterwards by the Romans—all

* Psalm cxxxix. 1—10. † Exod. xv. 11. ‡ Josh. xxiv. 19.—See page 269.

speak one language—all are written to us that we *sin not*.

There is another set of scripture truths which are of a *consolatory* nature; yet they are aimed at the same thing. For what purpose was the Son of God manifested in human nature? Was it not that he might destroy the works of the devil? To what are we elected? That we should be holy, and without blame before him in love. To what are we predestinated? That we might be conformed to the image of his Son. Why did he give himself for us, but that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works? Why are we called out of a state of darkness into his marvellous light, but that we might walk as children of light? Of what use are the exceeding great and precious promises of the scriptures? Is it not that, having them, we should cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God? That is not Christianity that does not operate in this way. He that sinneth habitually is of the devil, and hath not seen or known God. Wicked men seek a system of religion which may consist with their lusts; and God in righteous judgment often suffers them to find it; but it is

not the gospel: the language of the gospel is, These things are written to you that ye sin not!

The scriptures guard the doctrine of grace, not indeed by limiting its operations to lesser sinners, but by insisting on its mortifying and sanctifying effects. The apostle Paul, notwithstanding all that he had written on justification by faith, exempts none from condemnation but those that were in Christ Jesus; and admits none to be in Christ Jesus but those who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. He still declared, "If ye live after the flesh, ye shall die."* There is a *universality* pertaining to true holiness, which distinguishes it from all that is spurious. We must be "holy in *all manner of conversation*," or there is no real holiness in us.† A single *wicked way* will lead to destruction.‡ The certain perseverance of the saints is not, that a person having once believed, whether he depart from God or not, shall be finally saved: but that God having put his fear in his heart, he shall not be suffered wholly to depart from him.§ If any man, therefore, depart utterly from God, he ought to conclude that the fear of God was not in him. If the blossom go up as the dust, the root was

* Rom. viii. 1, 13. † 1 Pet. i. 15, ‡ Psa. cxxxix. 23, 24. § Jer. xxxii. 40.

rottenness. If in times of temptation we fall away, it is because we have no root in ourselves. "If, (says the apostle John,) they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us."* Even our *partial* departures from God must render our state doubtful. When the Galatians doubted the gospel, the apostle stood in doubt of them; declaring he was afraid of them, lest he had bestowed upon them labour in vain.† And had they judged according to evidence, as he did, they must have stood in doubt of themselves. To represent, as some do, that doubts and fears of this kind are the temptations of satan, or the workings of unbelief, and require to be resisted, as that which is dishonourable to God, is to promote the most dangerous delusion, and to bring the blood of souls upon their own heads. The things which they call the temptations of satan may be found to be the dictates of an awakened conscience, which they endeavour to lull asleep. Doubts of the goodness or veracity of God, or of the all-sufficiency or willingness of the Saviour to receive those that come to him are indeed dishonourable to God; but doubts of our own sincerity, founded upon our departures

* Isai. v. 24. Luke viii. 13. 1 John ii. 19. † Gal. iv. 11, 20.

in heart and conduct from him, are so far from being sinful, that they are necessary to awaken us to self-examination. Thus the Corinthians, who had sunk into many and great evils, were called upon, not to hold fast the persuasion that notwithstanding this their state was safe; but to "Examine themselves whether they were in the faith, and to prove their ownselves;" and assured that, except indeed they were "reprobates," or disapproved of God, "Jesus Christ was in them"—that is, by his word and Spirit, bringing forth fruit.* We proceed to observe,

II. THE SPECIFIC PROVISION FOR THEIR FAULTS AND FAILINGS: "And if any man sin we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." This is to prevent *despair*.

It is here supposed that though it is the habitual aim of true Christians not to sin, yet in this world they are not free from it. Some have fallen into grievous sins, as we too well know from scripture, observation, and in many instances from painful experience. Others who have not fallen so as either to disgrace themselves or the name of Christ, yet have much sin wherewith to reproach themselves, in deeds, or words,

* 2 Cor. xiii. 5. John xv. 4, 7.

or unlawful desires. The petition in the Lord's prayer, "forgive us our trespasses," shews that we sin, and need forgiveness, as often as we need our daily bread. If any man imagine himself to have arrived to sinless perfection, he must be wofully blind to the spirituality of the divine law, and to the extent of his obligations. "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us."*

Farther, it is here suggested that whatever be our sin, yet that if we confess it with a contrite heart, and believe in Jesus who died for sinners, and rose from the dead, and ascended to the Father, he will be our advocate, and our sins shall be forgiven for his sake. It was in this way that David was forgiven. It is true Christ had not then died, nor risen, nor ascended to be the advocate with the Father; but in his penitential prayer he believed in him according to the light that he possessed, and which might be much greater than we imagine. His prayer to be "purged with hyssop," doubtless alluded to the purgations under the law, by dipping a bunch of hyssop in blood, and sprinkling it upon the unclean: but as none of these ceremonial purgations were admissible in cases of adultery

* 1 John i. 8.

or murder, he cannot be understood as speaking literally. He must therefore have believed in a purgation of which this was only a shadow.

It was in this way that the Israelites were forgiven, when praying with their hands spread towards the temple.* It was not to the building that they directed their prayer, but to Him who dwelt therein, between the cherubim, upon the *mercy-seat*. It was to the Lord God of Israel as thus dwelling upon the *mercy-seat* that Jonah, at the last extremity looked and lived. "Then I said I am cast out of thy sight; yet I will look again toward thy holy temple.†"

In this way, whatever sins we have committed, we must seek for mercy; and for our encouragement we are assured of an "advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous."

But here we must be a little more particular. Here are three parties concerned; the Father, the criminal who has sinned against him, and the Advocate who undertakes his cause.—The *Father* in this case sustains the character of a Judge, "God the Judge of all:"—The *criminal* is supposed to stand before the judgment-seat,

* 1 Kings viii. 38, 39. † Jonah ii. 4.

not however, in an impenitent state of mind, but like Job, when he said, "Behold I am vile, what shall I answer? I will lay my hand upon my mouth. Once have I spoken, but I will not answer: yea, twice, but I will proceed no further. —I abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes!"* Or like David, when he said, "I acknowledge my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me." Against THEE, THEE ONLY have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight: that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and clear when thou judgest!†—Here comes in the *advocate*. The sinner could not be heard for himself, nor pardoned in his own name: but believing in Christ, he undertakes to plead his cause. He had said himself in effect, *Do not condemn me!* To this the advocate adds, *Do not condemn him!*

On this part of the subject we must be still more particular. An advocate, especially one that undertakes the cause of sinners, requires to have an interest with the Judge—to be interested for the sinner—while pleading for him, not to palliate but condemn his sin—to be fully acquainted with his case—and to have something to plead that shall effectually overbalance his

* Job xl. 4, 5. xlii. 6. † Psa. li. 3, 4.

unworthiness. Let us inquire whether all these qualifications be not found in our Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.

First, He has the highest interest in the favour of the Judge.—For why? He is his only begotton Son, who dwelleth in his bosom, and who never offended him at any time, but always did that which was pleasing in his sight. So well pleased was the Father with his obedience unto death, that he highly exalted him, giving him a name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.* "The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into his hand."† Well might he say when on earth, "I knew that thou hearest me always;"‡ for he had in prophecy invited him to prefer his request—"Ask of me, and I will give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession."§ Who can doubt the success of a cause in the hands of such an advocate?

Secondly, He is deeply interested in favour of the sinner.—If we had to be tried before an

* Phil. ii. 9—11. † John iii. 35. ‡ John xi. 42. § Psa. 2. 8.

earthly tribunal, and wished to engage an advocate, we should certainly prefer one that would so identify himself with us as to be deeply interested in the issue. When Moses pleaded for Israel to be forgiven, at Horeb, he requested to die rather than not succeed. "Oh, (said he), this people have sinned a great sin. Yet now, if thou wilt, forgive their sin: and if not, blot me I pray thee out of thy book which thou hast written!"* This was the true spirit of an advocate; and he succeeded. But our Advocate has gone farther than *requesting* to die; he actually died for us, and his death is the propitiation for our sins," on which his advocateship is founded.†

Thirdly, While pleading for sinners he does not palliate, but condemns their sin.—If Moses had attempted to apologize for Israel's idolatry, his interposition must have been rejected. And if it had been possible for Christ himself to have been an advocate for sin, he could not have been heard. But he was no less averse to sin than the Judge himself. If he was made *in the likeness* of sinful flesh, yet was there no participation of it. Though he descended and lived among sinners, yet in respect of character, he was holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from them.

* Exod. xxxii. 32. † 1 John ii. 2.

While advocating their cause, it was in his own proper character of "Jesus Christ *the righteous.*" It was because of his proceeding on these just and honourable principles that the Father approved and honoured him. "Thou lovest righteousness, and hatest wickedness: therefore God, thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows."

Fourthly, He is perfectly acquainted with the case of those whose cause he undertakes.—There are cases which, if the advocate had known all, he would not have undertaken; and which, for want of his being in possession of the whole truth, fail in his hands. But our Advocate knows the worst of us. He needeth not that any should testify of man; for he knows what is in man. When Simon the Pharisee saw a woman that was a sinner standing at the feet of Jesus, washing them with her tears, wiping them with the hairs of her head, kissing them, and anointing them with ointment; and all this without receiving any repulse from him, he suspected that he was *deceived,* and concluded in his own mind that he could not be that prophet that should come into the world. Had he known her true character, he supposed he would not have permitted her to touch him! To convince Simon

that he was not ignorant of *her* character, he, by answering his private thoughts, proved himself to be fully acquainted with *his*; and proceeded to plead the cause of the penitent sinner, though her sins were many, and to justify himself in receiving and forgiving her.*

Our Advocate not only knows all our sins, but *all our wants;* and therefore knows how to provide for them. If previous to the prayer for Peter it had been referred to him what should be asked on his behalf, having no suspicion of any peculiar temptation being at hand, he might not have been able to say what it was that he most needed. But his Advocate knowing the temptation that awaited him, framed his plea on his behalf accordingly—"I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not."

Lastly, Though he finds no worthiness in the sinner on which to ground his pleas, but the greatest unworthiness, yet he has that to plead which effectually overbalances it.—It is remarkable that in that admirable speech of Judah on behalf of Benjamin,† he did not fetch his pleas from the innocence of the young man, nor from the possibility of the cup being in his

* Luke vii. 36—48. † Gen. xliv. 18—34.

sack without his knowledge, nor from the smallness of his offence; but from his father's love to him, and his own engagements to bring him back and set him before him! I need not say that on this principle our advocate has proceeded. The charges against Benjamin were mysterious and doubtful, yet as Judah could not prove his innocence, he admitted his guilt. But our guilt is beyond doubt; in pleading our cause the Advocate is supposed to rest it on the "propitiation;" in consideration of which, our unworthiness is passed over, and our sins are forgiven. The connexion of things is often signified by the order of time in which they occur. Thus the out-pouring of the Spirit, that it might appear to be what it was, a fruit of the death of Christ, followed immediately after it: and thus, on his having died, and risen from the dead, his followers are directed to pray *in his name.** His directing us to pray in his name conveys the same idea, as to the meritorious cause of forgiveness, as his being our Advocate with the Father on the ground of his propitiation.

From the whole, We are directed to commit our cause to Christ. We have a cause pending

* John xvi. 23, 24.

which if lost, all is lost with us, and that for ever. We shall not be able to plead it ourselves; for every mouth will be stopped, and all the world become guilty before God. Nor can any one in heaven or earth besides the Saviour be heard on our behalf. If we believe in him, we have everlasting life: but if not, we shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on us.

We are also directed by this subject how to obtain relief under the numerous sins to which we are subject as we pass through life. We all have recourse to some expedient or other to relieve our consciences when oppressed with guilt. Some endeavour to lose the recollection of it amongst the cares, company, or amusements of the world; others have recourse to ceremonial observances, and are very strict in some things, hoping thereby to obtain forgiveness for others; on some the death and advocateship of Christ has the effect to render them unconcerned, and even to embolden them in their sins. Painful as our burdens are, we had better retain them than get relief in any of these methods. The only way is, to come unto God in the spirit of Job or of David before referred to, seeking mercy through the propitiation. Thus while

we plead, *Do not condemn me!* our Advocate will take it up, and add, *Do not condemn him!*

Finally, From the all-sufficiency of the propitiation, there is no room for despair. When Jonah was cast into the sea, and swallowed by the fish, still retaining his consciousness, he concluded that all was over with him. "I said I am cast out of thy sight." "Yet," even in this condition, the thought occurred, "I will look again toward thy holy temple." His body was confined, but his mind could glance a thought toward the mercy-seat from whence he had heretofore received relief. He looked, and lived. Let this be our determination whatever be our circumstances or condition. Jesus is "able to save to the uttermost all those that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for us."

SERMON XV.

ECCLESIASTES, i. 17, 18.

And I gave my heart to know wisdom, and to know madness and folly: I perceived that this also is vexation of spirit. For in much wisdom is much grief: and he that increaseth in knowledge increaseth in sorrow.

WE have in this book an estimate of human life. Most of the things that are seen under the sun here pass under review; and each as it passes is inscribed with vanity.

It may be thought from the pensive strain of the writer, to be an effusion of melancholy, rather than the result of mature reflection; but it should be considered that no man had greater capacity

and opportunity for forming a just judgment; that the book was written at the most mature period of life; and what is more, that it was written under divine inspiration.

As "wisdom and knowledge" in the writings of Solomon commonly include true religion, so "madness and folly" seem here to be used for irreligion. He studied the nature and effects of both good and evil.

In ascribing "vanity and vexation of spirit" to almost every thing that passed before him, he does not mean that they were in themselves evil, or of little or no value; but that every good had its alloy, or something attached to it which subtracted from it. Thus it was even with *wisdom* and *knowledge*. It is because these were not only good in themselves, but ranked high in the scale of what is estimable, that they are introduced. If the best things pertaining to human life have their alloy, the same must be said of the rest.

In discoursing on the subject we shall endeavour to shew the justness of the remark, and to draw some conclusions from it.

I. LET US ENDEAVOUR TO SHEW THE JUSTNESS OF THE REMARK, OR ITS AGREEMENT WITH UNIVERSAL EXPERIENCE.—Knowledge may be distinguished by its objects into three parts or branches: the knowledge of men and things about us; the knowledge of ourselves; and the knowledge of God. Each of these is good, and the practical use of it is wisdom; but each has its alloy, subtracting from the enjoyment which it would otherwise afford.

First, Let us try the justness of the remark in respect of *the knowledge of men and things about us*. None can deny that the thing itself is good and valuable, and the want of it to be regretted as an evil. "For the soul to be without knowledge is not good." It is this that distinguishes men from brutes, and raises some men much higher in the scale of being than others. Minds thus qualified are susceptible of much greater enjoyments than others, and are able to do much more good in their generation than others. The greatest and best things that have been done in the world have been done in general, not by the ignorant, but by men of understanding. Yet with all its advantages there is that attached to it which increaseth sorrow.

1. He that knows the most of mankind will see the most of their *faults* and *defects*, and so be compelled, upon the whole, to think the worst of them; and this to a good man must needs be a source of sorrow. I would by no means wish to cherish a spirit of misanthropy. I remember meeting with this sentiment in a speech delivered in a very respectable assembly—"I think well of man, but ill of men." On the contrary, I should say, I think ill of man, but well of men, till I see cause to think otherwise. Scripture, observation, and experience concur to justify me in thinking ill of human nature; but as in our world there is through the grace and goodness of God, a good number of upright and benevolent characters, it becomes me to hope the best of every man I meet, till I am obliged by his conduct or conversation to form a different judgment: and this I feel to be a principle at a much greater remove from misanthropy than the other.

There are cases in which the more we know of men, the more we shall see reason to esteem them; but this is not true of mankind in general. The longer we live, and the more we are acquainted with them, the more evil we shall see in them. The characters of the greater part of

men will not bear scrutinizing. If we look but a little below the surface, whether it be in high life, or low life, or even in middle life, we shall see enough to sicken our hearts. Many a favourable opinion formed under the philanthropic feelings of youth, has been obliged to give way to observation and experience; and many a pleasing dream, into which we have fallen from reading books, has disappeared when we came to read men.

2. He that knows the most of mankind will know most of their *miseries*; and, if he be a man of feeling, this must be another source of sorrow. Who can make himself acquainted with the privations and hardships of the afflicted poor without participating of their sorrows? This may be a reason why some who are in opulent circumstances decline visiting them. They seem to count the cost, not merely what it will require to supply their pecuniary wants, but what they shall lose by a diminution of their pleasure.

If, in addition to the state of the afflicted poor of our own country, we knew the miseries of *slavery*, would it not increase our sorrow? Who that has only acquainted himself with the facts which have been established during the late par-

liamentary discussions on the African slave-trade, can forbear weeping over the miseries which the avarice of one part of mankind brings upon another?—And if, in addition to this, we knew the miseries of *war*, must it not still more increase our sorrow? We hear of great battles, on which depend the fate of kingdoms, and rejoice or are sorrowful as they affect the interests of our country; but did we know all the individual misery produced by the most glorious victory, how different would be our feelings! Did we hear the cries of the wounded, and the groans of the dying; could we know the state of mind in which they died; were we acquainted with the near relations of the dead, the widows and orphans that they have left behind them—alas, were we in the midst of them, we might be reduced to the necessity of trying to get away and to forget them!

If, leaving these scenes of woe, we turn our eyes to the abodes of *ease and opulence*, we shall not find things as we might expect. How often are men envied, when, if we knew all, we should pity them! We form our estimates of human happiness more by appearances than by realities. We little think how many things are necessary to make us happy, any one of which,

if wanting, will render all the rest of little or no account. What are riches, and honours, and amusements, to one whose life hangs in doubt from some threatening disorder which he feels to be preying upon his vitals; or to a mind smitten with melancholy, or corroded with remorse; or to one whose peace is destroyed by domestic feuds, jealousies, or intrigues?

3. He that knows most of the *sentiments* of mankind on everlasting subjects, will, if he be a believer in divine revelation, know most of their devious and destructive tendency; and this must be a source of sorrow. There is what is called charity, that excites no sorrow on this account; but viewing all religions as nearly alike, all leading to one happy end, it renders the subjects of it quite easy and unconcerned. But Christian charity is another thing. It bears good will to all mankind, but does not think lightly of their alienation from God.

He that should doubt whether the sentence passed against a number of traitors was ever designed to be executed, and should persuade them into his way of thinking, might call himself a charitable man, might boast of his own happiness, and the happiness he produced in others,

and insist upon it that by entertaining such views he did more honour to the government than they who yielded to the gloomy apprehensions of an execution; but if, after all, his opinions should prove *false*, and be found to have originated in his own disloyalty, would not his charity be considered as cruel, deceitful, and destructive? Genuine charity would have endeavoured to convince them of their guilt, and to persuade them to sue for mercy to their justly offended sovereign. The only difference between this and the charity in question is, that the one goes to destroy men's lives, and the other their souls! He that can view whole nations of men, who from time immemorial have lived without Christ, having no hope, and without God in the world, and not feel a wish to burst their chains, of whatever religion he may profess himself to be, must himself be in the same state.

To read the controversies of former ages, and those of the present age *even in the Christian world*, must be depressing to a serious mind. He is either perplexed, and tempted to indulge in scepticism; or if he feels his own ground, still he must perceive great numbers wandering in the paths of error; and who, unless God give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth,

will continue to wander, notwithstanding all that can be said or written to reclaim them. They that have done the most towards bending the mind of man to that of Christ, and inculcating just sentiments of religion, will find, after all their labour, much remaining undone: so much both of the devious and the defective, that he may retire with the words of the wise man, —"That which is crooked cannot be made straight, and that which is wanting cannot be numbered!"

4. He that knows most of the religious world will see the most of its *faults and imperfections;* and this is another source of sorrow. Amongst his friends he will find some will prove false, and others fickle; and what is worse, many turning their back on Christ, and walking no more with him. The longer we live in Christian society, and the closer we are connected with it, the more jealousies, envies, evil-surmisings, whisperings, and backbitings, we shall discover. Those Christians who have to travel for the gospel, and only see their fellow-christians once in a week, are apt to consider themselves as under great disadvantages; and in some respects they certainly are so; but in others the advantage may be on their side. They do not hear so many

sermons, but having to travel they may be more likely to profit by those which they do hear. They miss much social intercourse; but they also stand aloof from the evils which frequently attend it. On looking round the place on a Lord's-day they see their Christian friends, as we say, in their best dress; knowing just enough to love them and pray for them, and to part with them with affectionate regret, while those who are acquainted with their faults as well as their excellencies, know to the increase of their sorrow.

Once more, He that knows most of the *things of this world*, will feel the greatest portion of disappointment from them; and this will be a source of sorrow. Riches, honours, and pleasures promise much, and while inexperienced, we may hope much; but a thorough trial will convince us that happiness is not in them. Even knowledge itself, the treasure of the mind, is not only attained with great labour, but is attended with much painful disappointment. "He that makes the greatest researches, (as Mr. Poole observes,) often finds himself deceived with knowledge falsely so called; often mistakes error for truth, and is perplexed with manifold doubts, from which ignorant men are free."

Secondly, Let us try the justness of the remark in respect of *the knowledge of ourselves.* Self-knowledge is doubtless good, and of great importance. Without it, whatever else we know, it will turn to but little account: yet this also is accompanied with sorrow. He that knows the most of himself sees most of his own faults and defects. It was by comparing his own mind with the word of God that David exclaimed, "Who can understand his errors? cleanse thou me from secret faults. Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins.*" The more we know of ourselves the worse we shall think of ourselves. We know but little of ourselves at the outset of the Christian life. We see evils in others and are shocked at them, and are ready to suppose ourselves incapable of any such things; but as the Lord led Israel through the wilderness, to humble them, and to prove them, and to know what was in their heart, so he deals with us. We have seen rich men high-minded, and may have thought that if God should give us wealth, how humble and generous we would be with it; we have seen poor men full of envy and discontent, and may have thought, were we in their situation, we would not repine; we have seen men fall in the hour of temptation, and

* Psa. xix. 12, 13.

may have joined in heaping censures upon them. If it please God to try us in these ways it may be to humble us, and the knowledge that we gain may be accompanied with not a little sorrow.

Thirdly, Let us try the justness of the remark in respect of *the knowledge of God*. No one can suppose but this in itself is good, and a source of the highest enjoyment: yet it is no less true that he that increaseth in it increaseth in sorrow. The more we know of God the more we shall perceive our contrariety to him. If like Joshua the High-priest, we were clothed with filthy garments, yet while surrounded with darkness, and in company with others like ourselves, we should be in a manner insensible of it; but if brought to the light, and introduced to one who was clothed in white raiment, we should feel the disparity. It is thus that not only those who are strangers to divine revelation, but those who read it without believing it, have no just sense of sin. It was thus that sin *by the commandment* became to the apostle Paul exceeding sinful; and that the prophet Isaiah, on beholding the glory of God, exclaimed, "Woe is me, for I am undone, because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell among a people of unclean lips:

for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of Hosts!"

Besides this, the knowledge of God draws upon us the hatred, and frequently the persecutions of wicked men, which, though we may be supported under them, yet in themselves must needs be sources of sorrow. "I have given them thy word," said our Lord in committing his disciples to the Father, "and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world."

I add, The knowledge of God will in some cases draw upon us the envy of false brethren. If a good man engage in the work of God from the purest principles, and by the divine blessing on his diligence and perseverance make such progress in useful knowledge as to draw upon himself a portion of public admiration, he may be expected soon to become an object of envy. Men shall rise up who will do their utmost to depreciate and eclipse him. "I considered all travail, and *every right work, that for this a man is envied of his neighbour.* This also is vanity and vexation of spirit."*

* Eccles. iv. 4.

II. LET US DRAW SOME CONCLUSIONS FROM THE SUBJECT.—If things be so, some may think we had better be without knowledge, and be contented to live and die in ignorance. This is not the consequence, however, which the writer wished to have drawn from what he wrote. He tells us that "for the soul to be without knowledge is not good;" and that "wisdom excelleth folly as much as light excelleth darkness." He must therefore have judged that whatever disadvantages attended wisdom and knowledge, the advantages arising from them were far greater. Much of the sorrow arising from a knowledge of ourselves and of God, is to be desired rather than dreaded; and as to that which arises from a knowledge of the evils of the world, and even of the church, it is best to know the truth, though it may give us pain. That exemption from sorrow which arises from ignorance is seldom enviable. To know the evils that are to be found among men is necessary, not only to enable us to guard against them, but to know how to deal with them in religious concerns. If we be ignorant of their faults and defects, we shall be at a loss to carry conviction to their minds, and so to make them feel the need of forgiveness through Jesus Christ. So to be ignorant of the faults and defects of men pro-

fessing religion, must be injurious both to them and to ourselves. Without knowing the truth concerning them we cannot reprove them, and so cannot reclaim them. If those of the house of Chloe had not written to Paul on the state of things at Corinth, it would have saved him much sorrow, but then what had been the state of the Corinthians? To all appearance they were in the way to ruin; and so a tribe, as it were, would soon have been lacking in Israel.—And as to *ourselves*, by knowing in a certain degree the evils that are to be found even in the church of Christ, we are better prepared to meet them, and less in danger of being stumbled, or tempted to think the worse of religion on account of them. By knowing things in some good degree as they are, we are enabled to make up our minds. Thus it is that the falls, and even the falling away of some, while it causes much pain, yet does not shake our faith. We learn to think well of religion, let those who profess it prove what they may. "Let God be true, and every man a liar!" And in knowing the faults and defects even of sincere Christians, we are not led to think ill of them as Christians, or lightly of Christian communion. If a true friend of his country could say, "England, with all thy faults, I love thee!" much more will a true friend of

the church of Christ consider Christians, with all their faults, as the excellent of the earth; better than the best of worldly men! And if we love them, it will be in our hearts to live and to die with them!

Nor is it unnecessary that we should be acquainted with the *miseries* of mankind, whatever sorrow they may occasion: otherwise we cannot sympathize with them, nor relieve them, nor pray for them, nor feel so great an anxiety for the coming of that kingdom whose healing influence shall remove their sorrows.

Three things, however, are taught us by this subject:—

First, To be moderate in our expectations, as to things pertaining to this life.—If "vexation of spirit" be attached to wisdom and knowledge, what can be expected from less valuable objects? 'We need but little, nor that little long.' The trial made by the wise man, of mirth and pleasure, of building and planting, of the gathering together of silver and gold, &c. is doubtless recorded to teach us that substantial good is not to be found in them. The consequence drawn by the Apostle from the brevity of life, is designed to moderate

both our attachments and our sorrows. "The time is short: it remaineth that both they that have wives be as though they had none; and they that weep, as though they wept not; and they that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not; and they that buy, as though they possessed not; and they that use this world, as not abusing it: for the fashion, or scenery, of this world passeth away."*

It may seem to some that if we were to feel and act up to this precept, it would deprive us of half our enjoyments: but this is a mistake. To be moderate in our expectations is to increase our enjoyment, while the contrary diminishes it. Expectation raised beyond what truth will support must be disappointed; and disappointment will embitter that which, if enjoyed in moderation would have been sweet." "Better is a little with the fear of the Lord, than great treasure and trouble therewith."†

Secondly, We are taught hereby to seek the favour of God, as the crowning blessing to all our enjoyments.—The vexation of spirit which belongs to the portion of a good man is not as that which attends the wicked. The first

* 1 Cor. vii. 29—31. † Prov. xv, 16.

is accompanied with a blessing, the other with a curse. "God giveth to a man that is *good before him*, wisdom, and knowledge, and joy: but to the sinner he giveth travail, to gather, and to heap up, that he may give to him that is good before God."* After all the particulars enumerated in the blessing of Joseph, as "the precious things of heaven, the dew, and the deep that coucheth beneath; the precious fruits brought by the sun, and the precious things put forth by the moon; the chief things of the ancient mountains, the precious things of the lasting hills, the precious things of the earth, and the fulness thereof—the crowning blessing follows, "*and the good will of Him that dwelt in the bush!* If this be wanting, all the rest will be unsatisfying. If this be on our heads, our sorrows, whatever they be, will be turned into joy.

Thirdly, We are taught hereby to aspire after a state in which good will be enjoyed without any mixture of evil as a subtraction from it. If our wisdom be that of which the fear of the Lord is the beginning, and the object of our knowledge be the only true God and Jesus Christ whom he hath sent, we shall soon reach that state of holiness and blessedness that is without

* Eccles. ii. 26.

alloy. "Wisdom, and knowledge, and joy" will then be given us, and all the sources of sorrow which have been enumerated will be dried up. The more we know of the inhabitants of that world the better we shall think of them, and the more we shall love them. Among all the nations of the saved we shall not find one whose character will not bear scrutinizing. If every heart were as naked to us as ours now are to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do, we should find nothing in them but love. No hypocrisies will be there, nor envies, nor jealousies, nor hard thoughts, nor evil-surmisings, to embitter the cup of joy. No surrounding miseries shall damp our bliss; no error shall throw a mist over our minds, or lead us aside from God. And, what is more still, no imperfections shall mar our services, nor indwelling sins pollute our souls. To this blessed state may we be led, by all the sorrows of the present life, unremittingly to bend our course.

SERMON XVI.

ROMANS viii. 18—23.

For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the Sons of God. For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope; Because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the first-fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body.

THERE is in this part of the epistle a richness of sentiment and a vast compass of thought. The apostle having established the great doctrine of justification by faith, dwells here on things

connected with it; some of which are designed to guard it against abuse, and others to shew its great importance. "There is now no condemnation, (saith he,) to them that are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit—If ye live after the flesh, ye shall die; but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live—As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God." Having thus entered on the privileges of believers, the sacred writer is borne away, as by a mighty tide, with the greatness of his theme. "Heirs of God"—what an inheritance! Such is the tenor of the covenant of grace; "I will be their God, and they shall be my people."—"Joint heirs with Christ"—What a title! We possess the inheritance not in our own right, but in that of Christ, who being "heir of all things, looketh down on his conflicting servants, and saith, "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit down with me in my throne, as I also have overcome and am set down with my Father in his throne." It is true we must suffer a while: but if it be *with him*, we shall be glorified together.

By "the glory to be revealed in us," is meant, not that glory which we shall receive at death, but the consummation of it at the resurrection.

It is the same as that which in the following verses is called "the manifestation of the sons of God"—"the glorious liberty of the children of God"—"the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body."—It is "that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ," for which Christians are taught to look—that "grace" in pursuit of which we are exhorted to gird up the loins of our minds, to be sober and hope to the end, and which is to be brought unto us at the revelation of Jesus Christ.*

On this great inheritance, to which the sons of God are heirs, the Apostle enlarges in the words of the text. It is an object of such magnitude, saith he, that all the sufferings of the present life are not worthy to be compared with it—of such magnitude as to interest the whole creation—and finally, of such magnitude that our highest enjoyments do not satisfy us, but we groan earnestly after the full possession of it. To review these three great points is all that I shall attempt.

I. SUCH IS THE MAGNITUDE OF THE GLORY TO BE REVEALED IN US, THAT THE SUFFERINGS OF THE

* Tit. ii. 13. 1 Pet. i. 13.

PRESENT TIME ARE NOT WORTHY TO BE COMPARED WITH IT.—In speaking of these opposites, the Apostle, as by a kind of spiritual arithmetic, seems to place them in opposite columns. The amount of the column of sufferings, if viewed by itself would appear great. Much evil attends us, both as men, and as good men. The misery of man is great upon him; and great are the afflictions which have been endured by the faithful for Christ's sake. For his sake they have been killed all the day long, and accounted as sheep for the slaughter. He who entered on this reckoning could not have made light of the sufferings of this present time for want of an experimental acquaintance with them. In answer to those who depreciated his ministry, he could say, "Are they ministers of Christ? (I speak as a fool,) I more; in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one: thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and

painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness: beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches. Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is offended, and I burn not?"* Yet the same person assures us that he reckons the sufferings of this present time not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us. They may be heavy and tedious when viewed by themselves, but weighed against a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory they are light and momentary.

It is thus that in the subject before us he considers our sufferings as confined to "this present time." The short duration of suffering in ordinary renders it tolerable, even though for a time it may be acute; and if succeeded by lasting enjoyment, we consider it unmanly to make much of it; and if it be in the service of a beloved sovereign, and in support of a cause of great importance, and which lies near the heart, it is usually treated as a matter of still less account. Thus it was that the apostle reckoned his sufferings not worthy to be compared with the glory to be revealed in us.

* 2 Cor. xi. 23—29.

To say of two things that one of them is not to be compared with the other is a strong mode of expression. It is in this way that the great God expresseth his infinite superiority to the most exalted creatures—"Who in the heavens can be compared to the Lord? Who among the sons of the mighty can be likened unto Jehovah?"* So when two things of an opposite nature come in succession, and the latter so entirely prevails over the former as to obliterate it, or in a manner to efface the remembrance of it, it may be said of the one that it is not to be compared with the other. Thus the joy that followed the resurrection of Christ was to the sorrow that preceded it—"Ye shall weep and lament, but the world shall rejoice: and ye shall be sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy. A woman when she is in travail hath sorrow, because her hour is come: but as soon as she is delivered of the child, she remembereth no more the anguish, for joy that a man is born into the world. And ye now therefore have sorrow: but I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you."† Such also will be the joy of the heavenly inheritance, that it will efface from our remembrance the few years of sorrow which have preceded it; so efface them, however,

* Psa. lxxxix. 6. † John xvi. 20—22.

that we shall never think of them with regret, but as a foil to heighten our bliss.

II. SUCH IS THE MAGNITUDE OF THE GLORY TO BE REVEALED IN US AT THE RESURRECTION, THAT ITS INFLUENCE EXTENDS TO THE WHOLE CREATION.—This I take to be generally expressed in the 19th verse, "For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God." That which follows in verses 20—22, explains and accounts for it, by shewing how the creatures were brought into a state of bondage by the sin of man, and how they shall be liberated from it when he is liberated. "For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope; because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now."

The "creature"—the "whole creation"—or "every creature," are the same thing, and denote, I apprehend, not man, but every creature around him which has been brought under the influence of his revolt. As when Achan sinned, all that

pertained to him suffered; so when our first parents sinned, the whole creation, in so far as it was connected with man, partook of the effects. This appears to be meant by the creature's being "made subject to vanity," and coming under "the bondage of corruption."

The creation was brought into this state of bondage, "not willingly," as was the case with man, but by the sovereign will of the Creator. He could have stopped the machinery of the material world, and at once have put an end to the rebellion; but he thought fit to order the laws of nature to keep their course, and as to the abuse that man would make of them, he should be called to account for that another day.

This bondage of the creatures, however, was not to be perpetual: he who subjected them to it, subjected them "in hope, because the creature itself also," as well as the sons of God, shall be delivered from its thraldom, and, as it were, participate with them in their glorious liberty. The redemption of our bodies will be the signal of its emancipation from under the effects of sin, and the birth-day as it were of a new creation. As by man's apostacy every thing connected

with him became in some way subservient to evil; so by the deliverance of the sons of God at the resurrection, they shall be delivered from this servitude, and the whole creation according to the natural order of things shall serve and praise the Lord.

But we must inquire more particularly into this *bondage* of the creatures, and into their *deliverance* from it.

It is true that the ground was literally cursed for man's sake, so as spontaneously to bring forth briars and thorns rather than fruits; the animals also have literally been subjected to great misery and cruelty; but it is not of a literal bondage I conceive that the apostle speaks; nor of a literal deliverance, as some have imagined, by the resurrection of animals; nor of a literal groaning after it. The whole appears to be what rhetoricians call a prosopopœia, or a figure of speech in which sentiments and language are given to things as though they were persons. Thus the earth is said to "mourn, and Lebanon to be ashamed" on the invasion of Sennacherib;* and thus the heavens are called upon to rejoice, and the earth to be glad, the sea to roar, the floods to

* Isa. xxxiii. 9.

clap their hands, and the trees of the wood to rejoice, at the coming of the Messiah.*

When God created the heavens and the earth, every thing was made, according to its nature and capacity, to shew forth his glory. Thus "the heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handy work. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge. There is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard."† Thus also heaven and earth are called upon to praise their maker—"Praise ye him sun and moon: praise him all ye stars of light: praise him ye heavens of heavens, and ye waters that be above the heavens. Praise the Lord from the earth, ye dragons and all deeps: fire and hail; snow and vapours; stormy wind fulfilling his word; mountains, and all hills; fruitful trees, and all cedars; beasts, and all cattle; creeping things and flying fowl."‡ Such was the natural order of things established by the Creator: every thing, consciously or unconsciously, furnished its tribute of praise to Him who is over all blessed for ever!"

* Psa. xcvi. 11—13. xcviii. 7—9. † Psa. xix. 1—3.
‡ Psa. cxlviii. 3—10.

But by the entrance of sin into the world, the creatures became subservient to it; as when a rebellion breaks out in an empire, the sources of the country being seized by the rebels, are turned to the support of their cause, and against their rightful owner; so every thing which God had created for the accommodation of man, or in any way rendered subservient to his comfort, was turned aside from its original design, and perverted to the purposes of corruption. The Lord complains of the "corn, and wine, and oil, and flax, and wool, which he had given to Israel, being prostituted to Baal; and threatens to recover them. Who can count the sacrifices and offerings which have been made of God's creatures to Jupiter, Mars, Venus, Bacchus, and other abominations of the west; or to Bramha, Veeshnoo, Seeb, Dhoorga, Juggernaut, and other abominations of the east? And though gross idolatry has in many nations been dispelled by the light of the gospel, yet still the bounties of providence furnished for the accommodation of man are made to serve his lusts. The sun cannot emit his illuminating and fructifying beams but to furnish food for the corrupt propensities of man. The clouds cannot pour down their showers but the effects of them are made subservient to sin. Rich soils and fruitful seasons become the hot-

beds of vice, on which, as in Sodom, men become ripe for destruction at an earlier period than ordinary.

The creatures have not only been subjected to the vanity of serving the idols and lusts of men; but have themselves been turned into gods, and worshipped to the exclusion of the Creator, who is blessed for ever!* There is scarcely a creature in heaven or on earth but what has been thus drawn into the service of "corruption." Not only the sun, and moon, and stars; but gold, and silver, and brass, and wood, and stone, and birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things! And though the light of the gospel has driven this species of stupidity out of Europe, (and which the science of Greece and Rome did not so much as diminish,) yet it is in no want of advocates amongst her degenerate sons. And they that would be ashamed to plead the cause of gross idolatry, yet in a manner idolize the works of God by opposing them to his word. The sweet singer of Israel, after celebrating the former, held up the latter as greatly exceeding them.† With him the light of nature, and that of revelation were in harmony: but unbelievers place them at variance. Nature with them occupies the place

* Rom. i. 25. † Psa. xix.

of God, and the light imparted by it is admired at the expense of his word. They have no objection to acknowledge a supreme being as the author of the machinery of nature, provided he would give up his moral government over them; but the scriptures are full of hard sayings, which they cannot hear! The works of God are silent preachers: in their mouth there is no reproof but what a hard heart can misconstrue into an approbation of the Creator, understanding his bounties as rewards conferred on his virtuous creatures; this therefore, is the only preaching which many will hear.

In these, and a thousand other ways, the creatures of God have been subjected to vanity. Had they been possessed of intelligence, they would, from the first, have risen up against us, rather than have submitted to such bondage. Yes, rather than have been thus forced into the service of sin by the rebel man, they would have conspired together to destroy him from the face of the earth. The sun would have scorched him; the moon with her sickly rays would have smitten him; the stars in their courses would have fought against him; air, earth, fire, water, birds, beasts, and even the stones, would have conspired to rid creation of the being, who by rebelling against

the Creator, had filled it with disorder and misery. And though the creatures are not possessed of intelligence, yet from a kind of instinctive tendency to vindicate the cause of God and righteousness, they are naturally at war with rebellious man. Were it not so there would be no need of a covenant to be made on our behalf with "the beasts of the field, the fowls of heaven, the creeping things of the ground, and even with the stones."*

God in his infinite wisdom saw fit to subject the creatures to this vanity for a season, contrary as it was to their nature; but it is only for a season, and therefore, is said to be "in hope:" in the end they that have abused them will, except they repent, be punished, and they themselves liberated from their hateful yoke. Thus for a season he subjected the seed of Abraham, his own servants, to serve the Egyptians; but "the nation, saith he, whom they shall serve will I judge, and afterwards they shall come out with great substance."†

The time fixed for the deliverance of the creatures from the bondage of corruption, is that of "the manifestation of the sons of God."

* Job v. 23. Hos. ii. 18. † Gen. xv. 13, 14.

Hence they are in a manner identified with them —"The earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God," looking for it as for their own deliverance. The redemption of our bodies from the grave will be the destruction of the last enemy, or, in respect of believers, the termination of the effects of sin: and as the thraldom of the creatures commenced with the commencement of sin, it is fit that it should terminate with its termination. Thus our resurrection will be the signal of emancipation to the creatures, and their emancipation will magnify the glory that shall be revealed in us. Heaven, earth, and seas, and all that in them is, will no longer be worshipped in the place of God, nor compelled to minister to his enemies; but in that renovated state "wherein dwelleth righteousness" shall exist but to praise and glorify their Creator.

The terms used to express the tendency of the creatures towards this great crisis are very strong. Nature is personified, and represented as upon the utmost stretch of expectation; as groaning and travailing in pain to be delivered. Assuredly that must be a most important object, the accomplishment of which thus interests the whole creation. This object is "the glory that shall

be revealed in us,"—"the manifestation of the sons of God"—"the glorious liberty of the children of God;" and thus it is that the apostle establishes his position, that such is the magnitude of the inheritance of believers, that the sufferings of the present time are not worthy to be compared with it.

But we must not dismiss this part of the subject without noticing more particularly these descriptions of the heavenly inheritance, "the glory to be revealed in us—the manifestation of the sons of God—and the glorious liberty of the children of God." They all refer to the perfecting of salvation through the death of Christ, which is the greatest display of the glory of God that ever has or will be made. This is the last of that series of events which have been carrying on from the beginning of the world, and to the accomplishment of which they have all been subordinate.

The glory that shall be revealed in us—There will doubtless be a flood of light and joy that will then open to our admiring minds; but the words seem rather to denote *the manifestation of the divine glory in our salvation* than its barely being *revealed to us*. Thus "the Lord Jesus

will come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired, in all them that believe."* The great Physician will appear with his recovered millions, and in the presence of an assembled universe, will present them to the Father. Thus the glory of God will be revealed to the universe *in* our salvation. All his glorious perfections will be manifested in such a light as they never were by any other of his works, nor by this till it was completed. And that which is revealed to the universe *in* us will not be less, but more of an enjoyment to us than if it had been revealed *to* us only. The joy of the returned captives was not diminished, but increased by the surrounding nations saying, "The Lord hath done great things for them!"†

The manifestation of the sons of God—The foregoing description of the heavenly inheritance had respect to God's manifesting *his* glory; this to his manifesting ours. We have been familiar with the terms *sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty;* but who has been able to comprehend the magnitude of the blessing! Even an inspired apostle was overwhelmed in thinking of it, and confessed his ignorance. Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon

* 2 Thes. i. 10. † Psa. cxxvi.

us, that we should be called the sons of God! Therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not. Beloved, now are we the sons of God; and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that when he shall appear we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is!"* Then the importance of being "heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ" will be apparent.

The sons of God have here been but little known. Not being distinguished by any thing pertaining to circumstances or outward condition, and that which has distinguished them being of a still and unostentatious nature, they have generally past through the world without attracting much of its notice, unless it has been to despise and persecute them. If they have been acknowledged as pious men, and have escaped the persecutions and reproaches of the wicked, yet being mostly poor, and undistinguished by brilliancy of talent, they have ordinarily been considered as beneath attention. But at that day the Judge of heaven and earth will distinguish them as the sheep that he will place at his right hand, and as the blessed of his Father, whom he will welcome to the kingdom prepared for them

* 1 John iii. 1, 2.

from the foundation of the world; while those who have despised and persecuted them, shall be sentenced to everlasting punishment.

The glorious liberty of the children of God—The children of God have possessed a glorious liberty from their first believing in Christ. The Son then made them free, and they were free indeed! And when the earthly house of their tabernacle is dissolved, and they are received among "the spirits of just men made perfect," this is a liberty more glorious. But while their bodies are imprisoned in the grave, the deliverance is not complete. They are as yet under thraldom. The promise of Christ to raise us up at the last day is yet unfulfilled. They have been delivered from the dominion of sin, and from the existence of it in their minds; but not from its effects. It is reserved for the second coming of Christ when he will come "without sin *unto salvation*," to accomplish this. This is the destruction of the *last* enemy; this therefore puts an end to the war. In the account of Christ's second coming there appears to be an allusion to the blowing of the trumpet of jubilee, and the liberation of the captives. "The Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and the *trump* of God,

and the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we who are alive and remain, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord."* The resurrection then will be to believers a *jubilee*, a day of deliverance. The account of it by the same apostle in the 15th chapter of his first epistle to the Corinthians, gives us the triumphant song which believers shall sing, standing over the graves in which they have been so long imprisoned—"O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!" This is the glorious liberty of the children of God, in which the whole creation shall participate.

III. SUCH IS THE MAGNITUDE OF THE GLORY TO BE REVEALED IN US AT THE RESURRECTION, THAT THOSE CHRISTIANS WHO HAVE POSSESSED THE HIGHEST ENJOYMENTS IN THIS WORLD WERE NOT SATISFIED WITH THEM; BUT GROANED WITHIN THEMSELVES, WAITING FOR THE POSSESSION OF IT.—"And not only they, (the creatures,) but ourselves also, even we ourselves

* 1 Thes. iv. 16, 17.

groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body."

By "we ourselves," I understand the apostle to mean, not believers in general, but those believers in his own times, who, with himself, possessed so large a measure of grace and peace as habitually to rejoice in the Lord. If we read the first chapters of the Acts of the Apostles, we shall perceive a mighty tide of joy in the minds of these Christians. "Continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God, and having favour with all the people." They did not merely rejoice *notwithstanding* the persecutions which they met with, but *in* them—"They departed from the presence of the council, where they had been *beaten*, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name." These good men seem to have found heaven upon earth. They had "the first-fruits of the Spirit," or those rich communications of the Holy Spirit, which, as the first-fruits under the law were the first and best of the kind, shewed what might be expected under the gospel dispensation. The Holy Spirit was imparted to them not only in a greater degree than usual, but

under the peculiar character of the *Spirit of adoption*, by which they were admitted to near communion with God, as children with a father. Nor was this confined to the days of Pentecost and the times immediately succeeding: forty years after this, Peter could say of the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, "Whom having not seen ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory"—and this too at a time when the "fiery trial" of persecution was coming or come upon them.

But notwithstanding the spiritual enjoyment possessed by these Christians, they looked forward with earnest desire for the coming of the day of God; not only as those who hasted towards it, but by their hopes and prayers would seem to hasten its approach. Such are the accounts given of them in the new testament. "Ye turned from dumb idols to serve the living and true God, *and to wait for his Son* from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, who delivered us from the wrath to come—He that testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly; Amen. Even so come, Lord Jesus."*

* 1 Thes. i. 9, 10. Rev. xxii. 20.

The enjoyments of the first Christians, instead of abating their desire for the coming of their Lord, appear to have heightened it. The more they possessed of the first-fruits the more they desired the lump. The fruits of Canaan brought into the wilderness were not designed to satisfy Israel, but rather to excite them to go up and possess the land.

It is this ardent desire that is expressed by the terms "groaning within ourselves." The groaning of the creation was in a figure, but this is real. These are those "groans which cannot be uttered," in verse 26; and which the Spirit of God excited in the way of hope, and patience, and prayer.

The terms by which the resurrection of believers is expressed, namely, "the adoption, and the redemption of our body," serve to heighten our ideas of the glorious event. It is observable that the apostle throughout this description makes use of what may be called old terms in a new sense. The "glorious liberty of the children of God," was, as we have seen, enjoyed by them in one sense from the day that they believed in Jesus; but in describing this event a new sense is put upon the same words. The idea of "adoption"

also had long been familiarized to Christians by the apostolic writings; but as used here it has a new meaning attached to it. From the day they received the Saviour, they received with him power to become the sons of God; the Lord Almighty as by a judicial act and deed put them among his children: but still the body being doomed to die because of sin, till this dishonour is wiped away there is something wanting to complete the execution of the deed. Our vile body must be changed, and fashioned like unto Christ's glorious body ere we can be actually and fully introduced into the heavenly family. We must put on immortality before we shall be fit company for immortals. We must be made equal to the angels ere we can associate with angels. Finally, to be completely "the children of God" we must be "the children of the resurrection."*

The disparity between old and new testament believers was such, that the former were represented as children in a state of minority, kept under tutors and governors till the time appointed of the Father, while the latter are supposed to be come to the possession of their inheritance:† how much greater then must be the disparity

* Luke xx. 36. † Gal. iv. 1—6.

between believers in a mortal, and in an immortal state: both are adopted into the family of God; but the one in a much higher sense than the other.

Similar observations might be made on the term *redemption* as here applied to the resurrection of the body. This term was familiarized to Christians by the apostolic writings. They had "redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins;" but here the word is used in a new sense, denoting the last act of deliverance, even that of the body from under the thraldom of death, and the imprisonment of the grave. It is in reference to this last act of deliverance that Christ is said to be made unto us .... redemption."* The redemption of our souls by his blood preceded his being made unto us wisdom, or righteousness, or sanctification; but the redemption of our body, as being the last act of deliverance, succeeds them. The body is a part of Christ's purchase as really as the soul. It is on this principle that the Corinthians were dissuaded from polluting it by fornication—"Ye are not your own, but bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's."† The resurrection of

* 1 Cor. i. 30. † 1 Cor. vi. 20.

the body, therefore, is the recovery of the last part of the Redeemer's purchase, signified by that expressive sentence so often repeated, "I will raise it up at the last day."

This is the glory that shall be revealed in us, with which the sufferings of the present time are not worthy to be compared; this is the great crisis of creation, to which all that precedes it tends as to its last end; and the result to which believers who have possessed the richest communications of grace in this life look with earnest expectation.

To conclude, We see here what a glorious hope the gospel sets before us. In point of magnitude, crowns and kingdoms are but baubles when compared with it: yet it is not for crowns and kingdoms that the bulk of mankind set at naught the heavenly prize, but for things of still less account. Thirty pieces of silver were in one case reckoned of more account than Christ; and in another a mess of pottage! "If ye be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, and not on things of the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ

who is our life shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory."*

Farther, We see here what encouragement there is to pray and labour for the promotion of Christ's spiritual kingdom in the world.—The glory to be revealed at the resurrection is not to be considered as a solitary event; but rather as the consummation of a series of events which shall have preceded it. Christ, we are told, "must reign till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death."† The reign of Christ, therefore, is now making progress towards this great crisis, and as it proceeds it in a degree produces the same effects as it will when perfected. As in proportion to the prevalence of the cause of corruption the creatures of God are subjected to the vanity of supporting it; so in proportion as the gospel prevails, and men are freed from the dominion of sin by believing in Christ, the creatures also are emancipated with them; from hence they are used to the glory of God, and not abused to support the cause of his enemies. Thus in promoting the cause of Christ we contribute to the deliverance of the creation.

* Col. iii. 1—4. † 1 Cor. xv. 25. 26.

Finally, We must not forget that the possession of all this glory stands connected with *justification by faith in Jesus Christ.* The whole is an inference arising from this doctrine. Whom he thus "justified them he also glorified." It is a very serious question, on what ground we rest our acceptance with God. It was at this doctrine that the Jewish nation stumbled and fell. Let their fall be our warning. "The Gentiles who followed not after righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness which is of faith. But Israel who followed after the law of righteousness, hath not attained to the law of righteousness. Wherefore? because they sought it not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law: for they stumbled at that stumbling-stone!"